UNDER THE SHADOW OF GALLOWS

By
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PREFACE

"Under the Shadow of Gallows" was first published in 1948 under the title "Thorns and Thistles." It is partly autobiographical and partly arealistic account of the grim struggle which the people of India waged against repressive British Imperialism. While going over the events of those dark days my imagination was filled with scenes of torture employed by the police to extort confessions, the faked and farcical trials at the lower courts, the stiff attitude of the special tribunals and the distressing and demoralizing conditions of jails where all of us, who had been condemned of waging war against his Imperial Majesty were imprisoned.

I was an accused in the second Lahore Conspiracy case (1930). I was one of the central figures but during the numerous interrogations. ! was subjected to almost all the coaxing and cajolaries, threats and bribulations which the diabolic minds of the authorities of law and order could conceive of; whether in the lock-ups of ordinary police stations or in the dark and dreary cells of the Lahore Fort. But our spirit was indomitable. The flame of liberty which had been lit in our minds could not be extinguished by the brute force of British Imperialists. When I looked back at the past, particularly the 15 years which were spent in the dark cells behind the prison walls along with fellow comrades, I was reminded of those early days of my boyhood when the stories of Kamagatamaru and the First Lahore Conspiracy

Case (1914-15), the Morchas of the Babar Akalis, the heroic exploits of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army led by such inspired luminaries as Chandar Shekhar Azad, Bhagwati Charan, S. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Datt, fired my imagination and drew me towards the ideals of militant nationalism.

I have tried to reply to as far as I could, the oft repeated question: Why did we practice the cult of the Bomb? Ours was a spontaneous reaction to the barbarous methods employed by the police in dealing with the non-violent satyagrahis and their sympathisers. I was Impatient of the atrocious British Raj and felt that the lideration of the country lay in the hands of the Hindustan Socialist Republic Army. We thought that by making a dramatic gesture we could instil courage in our people and fear in the minds of the police. Bound by oath of secrecy and charged with the same burning emotion we had decided to administer a strong warning to the police and its heartless mercenary agents by organizing simultaneous explosions of country-made bombs at half a dozen places. That landed us in the Lahore Central Jail.

I can still recollect the pure emotion in our young hearts when going to the jails was like a pilgrimage. I felt my life would be consecrated by my confinement. And so it was. I was sentenced to die and was moved into the same Ward No. 15 which had been the abode of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdev as also of Harikrishan of the Governor Shooting Case. The sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment and I was shifted to the Terrorist Ward to share the genial society of my old companions and comrades, Pt. Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal, Jahangiri Lal and Pt. Inder Pal. Besides,

there were other Terrorist prisoners like Bachint Singh and Udham Singh, the two Babar Akalis of Doaba, Mahatma Perma Nand of Jhansi, Pt. Kishori Lal of the First Conspiracy Case, Swami Hans Raj of the Suchet-Garh Shooting Case and Chaudhri Sher Jang of Nahan.

That was a period of remarkable inward growth and of mental and æsthetic development, for whatever time we could snatch out of our 'mushaqqat' in the jail, we devoted to the study of books, learning of new languages, cultivation of flower and vegetables and discussions in cur Literary League. It was a period of struggle for each concession had to be fought for. Even the most elementary rights of human being had to be forcefully asserted, sometime by resorting to hunger strikes. We had to make a concerted demand for the abolition of the inivdious distinction between 'B' and 'C' class political prisoners, particularly when after the release of the political prisoners by the Congress Ministry, the Government resorted to crude methods by transferring some of us to outside jails and offering better class treatment to others. Meanwhile, wiih a declaration of the Second World War the Punjab Government launched upon a policy of reckless suppression of civil liberties and public opinicn. Vehement protests against this reactionary and tyrannical policy swelled cur ward nct cnly with old time radical workers like RaJbans Krishan, Nawabzadas Mahmud Ali and Mazher Ali and Daniel Latifi but also with 'individual satyagrahis' like Mian Iftikharuddin, Dr. Gopi Chand, L. Bhim Sen Sachar, Pt. Neki Ram Sharma and S. Partap Singh Kairon.

Time has passed and has even changed quite a few of my comrades. Some have succumbed to the pressure of power-

politics and given up their old selfless and sacrificing ideologies, some others have strayed into fissiparous fields and activities, associating themselves with linguistic, communal and regional agitations. It was, therefore, not an easy task to attempt a reappraisal of the events and personalities of those times which were so crucial in the life of the Indian Nation. I think, I have successfully resisted a strong urge to make any material change in the observations and opinions expressed by me about these comrades in the earlier edition published nearly 15 years ago, There are also others with whom I have been intimately in contact, particularly those who have rallied round S. Partap Singh Kairon, who epitomises into his unique personality both the age-old nationalistic fervour as well as the dynamic progressive vision of consolidating the country's hard won freedom. In a way working with Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, is a kind of my previous experience and it is a thrilling experience to be a partner with him in the significant task of building Punjab.

Lastly, I would like to mention that I have added a chapter to the text used in 1948 Edition entitled "My Predecessors." I thought that it would help the reader in correct appreciation of the past if the growth and development of militant nationalism in India from the time of its pioneers Birinder Kumar and his brother Arvind Ghosh to the period of my contemporaries is traced. I have tried to spot-light the contributions of those sons of the Motherland, members of the Anusilan Society, Abhinav Bharat Society, the Ghadar Party, the Indian Patriots Association, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army and finally the Indian National Army of Netaji Subhash Bose, who took to the extreme revolutionary type of activity because of a strong moral conviction that purely constitutional methods

and political agitations were not enough to save the country from repressive foreign rule. Of course, the methods employed by these organizations were different, but their motive was the same as that of other compatriots.

While writing first Edition and recalling and recounting all those events I was hopefully watching the progress of new India under the stevardship of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. The country has been passing from one phase into the other achieving greater glory in all fields. It has always sent a deeply felt thrill in my being to know that the vision which we had seen in the dark British prisons has come true and that the people can hold their head high in pride under the leadership of our beloved Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Jai Hind.

GULAB SINGH

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Author before arrested.



Author after release



Partap Singh Kairon with P.M.

MY PREDECESSORS

THE struggle for our indepence is a long, long story, which begins simultaneously with the subjugation of Bengal, and the subsequent annexations of our territory by Imperialist Britain. The reaction against aggression and exploitation gained momentum in course of time, and the year 1857 witnessed the igniting of sparks into a huge conflagration emitting spouts of heat and hatred. But it was ruthlessly suppressed and the rebellious hosts were mercilessly punished, killed or driven away. The atrocities committed by the British in restoring order helped only to produce a plentiful crop of bitterness. Bahadurshah, the last of the Mughals, at the sight of the heads of his three princes Mirza Mughal, Khizar Sultan and Abu Bakar, which were presented to him by Hudson, sighed and remarked, "praise be to god! The progeny of Timur used to come before their fathers in the same glory of self-sacrifice". The Company Rule was so heartless and cruel, and the sufferings of the people so intense, that it was brought to an end in 1857. But the transference of power to the Crown hardly made any material difference, for, the British Rulers, once saddled on the back of the people of India and feeling secure, adopted an equally arrogant and insolent attitude towards their subjects. Instead of becoming champions of the aspirations of the Indian masses, their system of Government gave rise to a class of servile lackeys, grovelling and fawning upon their masters in return for small crumbs and caresses bestowed lavishly upon them. This was a class which sang the praises of the glories of the British Raj and of its sense of justice and fairness; it was fascinated by the lustre of the western civilization and institutions. The embers of the revolution however were not altogether extinguished; they lay smouldering and some one would arise here and there, to kindle them into a flame. The disciples

of the Kuka Guru, Satguru Ramsinghji rose in revolt in 1871, when 50 of them were blown away by cannon and another 18 were handed over to the hangmen. His idealistic attitude to life had convinced him that political independence was a pre-requisite of religious freedom; and struck by the prevailing apathy and frustration among the masses, he set himself to the task of making them rise, in a religious crusade against the foreign yoke. The switch-over from Bhagti Marg to Karma Marg was notable in the teachings of the Guru, who came to believe that all our present ills were due to our being slaves of the British masters. The Kuka rebellion, though premature and even unauthorised by Satgur Ramsingh, was suppressed with barbaric severity. It, therefore, gave birth to an army of robust nationalists, who, with their puritan way of living, and their determined faith in the ideals of their master, played a heroic role in the struggle for their country's freedom. Now and then, there appeared a luminary in the Indian firmament who would infuse revolutionary spirit, and appeal to the masses to think of their nation and to uphold its cause. In December 1872 and February 1873, Justice Ranade, the gifted pioneer of all political and social movements of those days in Maharashtra, pleaded the cause of the Swadeshi trade, and Vasudev Balwant Rao Phadke, an employee of the Military Finance Department at Poona was greatly inspired by his speeches. Phadke once received a letter about his mother lying ill on her death bed, and applied for leave to his English boss, who was too callous to oblige him. Phadke went to his native village, only to find that his mother had died, after struggling in vain to have the last look at her son. Next year, on the day of her death anniversary, he again applied for leave, which was again refused. Phadke read in it a warning from the Providence to hark to the call of Mother India, who lay hand and a foot tied under the foreign yoke. He decided to break off the yoke of his personal slavery and to go to the masses to rouse them for an unrelenting struggle against the foreign rule. He went from place to place,pouring forth tirades against

the atrocious British Raj. He was an equally forceful writer, and his words,whether spoken or written, never failed to inflame and enthuse the people. But this crusade through speeches and writings did not give him much satisfaction. He realised at an early date that lecturing all through his life would perhaps not take him very far towards the goal, and would not enable him to break the spell of Western institutions and ideas. The basic thing was to rouse the spirit of the masses and raise them from the nether-most depths of degradation to the heights of defiance and revolt. "Who has ever regained a precious jewel swallowed by a fish, without tearing open its belly with the point of a knife?" he asked.

He gathered together an army of young men, and in 1879 raised the banner of rebellion. His plan was to organise revolts at as many places as possible by cutting of communication wires, and stoppage of trains. He thus aimed at paralysing administration and thereby creating an atmosphere favourable to an armed uprising. He resorted to armed dacoities in order to secure funds for his purposes. He was the first revolutionary to adopt guerilla tactics of harassing the military and the police. His was the first revolt after 1857, against the foreign rule. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, and died as a result of inhuman tortures in Aden in February 1883

In 1897 the Bombay Presidency was visited by a new loathsome epidemic, the bubonic plague, which took a heavy toll of life. The Plague Act of 1897 though a beneficient measure, was enforced in an unwise manner. It was nothing short of Martial Law for the Maharashtrians in Poona, and the British soldiers who had been employed for the purpose went into the houses,examining men, women and children and took them to isolation hospitals if there was any sign of the disease. They proved more dangerous to the people than plague and infuriated them by their acts of desecration of temples, and violations of the chastity of women.

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, that illustrious son of India, raised his voice against these atrocities, but according to the

words of Shailendra Nath Ghosh, a Bengal revolutionary, "the ears of the English Rulers were so stone deaf that nothing except the shots of pistols could awaken them." They paid no heed to strong writings in the press ; and on June 22, 1897, a sensitive young man Mr. Damodar Chapekar shot the unpopular Plague Commissioner Mr. Rand and his associate Balkrishan, fearing immediate haul-up, shot Lt. Ayerst who was following Mr. Rand in a carriage. The Chapekar brothers were seized of the spirit of martyrdom, and were both hanged. The third and the youngest also met the same fate after he had murdered a prosecution witness in the case against his brothers. Before doing so he had gone to seek the blessings of his mother and had said,"Two of the flowers have been laid at the feet of the Deity. Allow me mother, to reach their feet." The mother only kissed her son but could utter no word !

The Nationalist movement in the beginning represented two different types of people, one were a moderate or a liberal type, who were not prepared to make personal sacrifices by coming into open conflict with the authorities. They had very modest objectives and demanded piecemeal reforms in the administration of the country. Their demands were couched in an almost prayerful language and they had such an abiding faith in the sense of justice and fairplay of the British that they hoped they could even get the right to govern their country only if they could convince the British Nation of the justice and soundness of their demand. They counselled patience and gradualness of reforms. The second group of people were men of great courage and of self-reliant and independent spirit. They were distinguished from the other group by their disbelief in the good faith and sincerity of the foreign rulers, and were in no mood to remain content as beggars, whining for favours. They were out to overthrow their arrogant masters by means of a violent revolution, if necessary. A retired civil servant, Mr. Allan Octavius Hume, founded the Indian National Congress in 1885 with a view to providing a safety valve against the rising tide of anti-British feeling and for diverting Indian political

agitation into constitutional channels. The Congress began with faith in the British sense of justice and admiration of connections with England, and the anti-climax came with the "Quit India" movement of 1942 when India was fed up with British connection, and wanted the British to leave her alone, under all events.

As coincidence would have it, a galaxy of intellectual giants, religious revivalists and political reformers appeared on the Indian firmament immediately after 1857, when the suppression of the masses was at its highest,and their spirits were consequenty at the lowest ebb. Dadabhai Naoroji, Feroze Shah Mehta, Ranade, Gokhale, Tilak, Devendranath Tagore, Raja RamMohan Rai, Swami Ramakrishna Paramahans, Swami Vivekanand, Swami Ram Tirath, Mahatma Gandhi, C.R. Dass, Pandit Motilal Nehru and many others appeared on the Indian scene. There were also those, more sensitive and more impassioned, who believed in the efficacy of revolutionary methods ; and by the side of luminaries like Gandhi and Tagore, there were revolutionaries like Shyamji Krishna Varma, Madame Cama, Arvind Ghosh and his brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Lala Hardyal and others, who felt disappointed at the meagreness of the British response to the national demand, and took to the cult of the bomb. They openly preached the new cult, and secret societies like the Abhinav Bharat in the South and Anushilan Samities at Calcutta and Dacca in the East, came into being. The Chitpavan Brahmins had raised the banner of revolt in Maharashtra. Ranade and Gokhale, the two great Chitpavans were Brahmins. Tilak also a Chitpavan, was supporter of extremist activity. The partition of Bengal on sinister communal lines, by Lord Curzon, exasperated the people and gave birth to a wave of revolutionary activity throughout Bengal. The unwise Colonization Acts in the Punjab created an equally tense situation and men like Lala Lajpat Rai, S. Ajit Singh, Sufi Amba Parshad, Lala Banke Dayal ignited the spark. V.D. Savarkar went to England and stayed at India House, owned

by Pt. Shyamji Krishna Varma. India House was a place of shelter for every Indian landing on the shores of Britain. Lala Hardyal joined these revolutionaries as a member of the Abhinav Bharat. They established contacts with Sinn Feiners, the Irish Revolutionary Party and Russian Nihillists. Senapati Pandurang Bapat was sent by them to Russia to receive training in Bomb-making. He returned to India and began to impart training in that art.

The 1857 revolt and the Kuka rebellion were attempts at mass revolt; they had nothing to do with the creed of terrorism. But the ruthless manner in which these earlier attempts at securing independence were suppressed, gave rise to anarchistic activities. The partition of Bengal in the face of universal opposition permeated the people with noble patriotic spirit and enthusiasm, and aggravated the evil it was intended to cure. They resorted in turn to the rigorous boycott of English made goods The youth of Bengal was exhorted to rise and destroy the alien rule, and a number of secret Terrorist societies were formed where young men were trained in the use of weapons and manufacture of bombs. The Bengali press acquired a militant nationalist tone and Sh. Barindra Kumar Ghosh, founder of the "Yugantar" assumed the role of its fiery prophet. The Anushilan Samiti had more than 500 branches, and one important item of its programme was to plan and execute acts of terrorism. 34 persons were charged with waging war against the King Emperor in the famous Alipore Conspiracy Case after an Ammunition Factory was discovered in Calcutta. On July 24, 1910,a Deputy Superintendent of Police was shot dead while leaving the High Court conducting the trial of this case. In the Howrah Conspiracy Case, another batch of 50 revolutionaries was tried, and the Dacca Conspiracy Case resulted in the rounding up of most of the revolutionary workers of Bengal. The "Kesri", a weekly contemporary of the Bengal "Yugantar", had been started by Lokmanya Tilak, in Maharashtra, and was carrying on the political and religious instruction of the masses. Ganesh Savarkar, the elder brother of Vinayak Damodar, the

moving force behind the Abhinav Bharat Society (Young India Society) was sentenced to transportation for life on June 9, 1909, on a charge of preaching "the cult of violence against the foreign and oppressive Govt.", thus bringing it into disrepute. Mr. Jackson, the District Magistrate of Nasik who had committed him for trial was shot dead by a young Brahmin on December 21, 1909, at a farewell party held in his honour. Three Chitpavan Brahmins were executed and another twenty-seven awarded long imprisonments in this case, which came to be known as Nasik Conspiracy Case. The Abhinav Bharat Society had its members even in the neighbouring States. They were charged with conspiracy to wage war both in Gwalior and Satara, and were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Khudi Ram Bose and Prafulla Chandra Chakie were deputed by the revolutionary party in Bengal to kill Mr. Kingsford, the notorious Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, who had inflicted heavy punishments on young Swadeshi workers ; and had got himself transferred to Muzaffarpur for fear of action by their co-workers. On April 30, 1908, bombs were thrown into the carriage supposed to be carrying Mr. Kingsford but two European ladies seated therein were killed instead. Chakie shot himself with his own revolver but Bose escaped, only to be captured, tried and hanged. Arvind Ghosh, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Kanai Lal Dutt, Hemchandra Das, Ashok Chandra Nandi, Moti Lal Bose and many others, about 40 in number, were arrested and tried in this case. Arvind was defended by Shri C.R. Dass, and retired after acquittal to Pondicherry in French India. Narendra Gosain who had turned an approver was shot down by Satyendra Nath Bose and Kanhailal Datta, in the Alipora Jail Hospital, where they had followed him after feigning illness. Satyendra and Kanhailal were tried separately and hanged. The trial of others beginning on May 2, 1908, concluded on February 12, 1910. It was during this trial, that Ashutosh Biswas, the Public Prosecutor, and an Inspector Police were shot dead in the court compound. Barrister C.R. Dass continued arguing the case for 18 days at

the close of which Barinder Kumar and Ulhaskar were sentenced to death, and others were awarded sentences ranging from 1 to 5 years rigorous imprisonment each. Death sentences were, however, commuted to life imprisonment on appeal.

There was a large number of revolutionary organisations and groups working in Bengal, such as Calcutta Anushilan Samiti, Yugantar group of Calcutta, East Club of Calcutta, Saraswati Samiti of Calcutta, Suhrid Samiti of Mymensingh, Bandhav Samiti of Barisal, Yuva Samiti of Faridpur, Jana Mangal Samiti of Bogra, Dacca Anushilan Samiti with its numerous branches. These secret organisations chalked out terrorist programmes in their own independent manner. They could thus remain undiscovered for a longer period than those which worked together. Terrorism laid emphasis on personal courage, fearlessness and individual sacrifice and aimed at terrorising police officers, trying Magistrates, Prosecution lawyers , hostile witnesses, and all those who perpetrated excesses on freedom fighters and lovers of the Motherland. A patriotic and courageous individual, by his readiness for extreme sacrifice inspired others so inclined, and a party or a group or a revolutionary organisation came into being. Groups collaborated with one another on occasions, but they continued to maintain their separate entities. A daring deed always brought some more daring people together, for the purpose of another equally daring exploit in the national field. There was thus no end to the "actions," carried on in Bengal. The deaths of terrorists by hanging inspired the people to such an extent that several necks ready for being squeezed at the gallows spouted out spontaneously out of the mass. The hanging of a single terrorist would move the whole mass of humanity, its intelligentia, writers, orators, and most of all, the workers. A sea of men and women surged around the cremation ground where Khudi Ram Bose was cremated. Every Bengali family carried a pinch of the ashes and preserved it in some gold or silver casket as an object of worship. A terrorist wished for nothing more. He wanted to die only for setting an example

to others. He wanted the people to cast off their fear of the British rulers and to meet them as man to man. He wanted to pose a counter-terror against the terror of the Gorashahi (British autocrats) and nothing desisted him from his decided path.

A terrorist was a person with limited means and a limited objective. He had an appeal to the masses, and he was an abiding attraction. Next to him was the role of a guerilla fighter. A Terrorist group with large following would sometimes adopt guerilla tactics, but usually it kept itself within the bounds of a swooping action and was then eliminated from the scene.

There were, however, some terrorists who believed in the ideology of anarchism. They waited for a suitable opportunity to enlarge their field of activity. The names of Rash Behari Bose, Yatindra Nath Mukerji, Shachindra Nath Sanyal, and of Master Amir Chand, Bhai Balmukand, Shri Basant Kumar Biswas and Shri Avadh Behari, the four who were hanged in the Hardinge Bomb Case and many others may be counted in the same category. Shri Amir Chand was a teacher in the Mission High School Delhi and took charge after L. Hardayal went abroad to organise the movement from within. A British officer asked Shri Avadh Behari before his execution, "What is your last wish !" "The end of British Imperialism!" was the prompt reply . "What do you gain by such talks now? You should die in peace !" remarked the officer, and Shri Avad Behari replied, "What sort of peace? I wish the fire to spread all round, you should burn, we should burn, and so should our slavery leaving the pure gold of India behind!"

Bhai Balmukand, a descendent of Bhai Mati Dass, who was tortured and cut in twain to death by a saw, was another associate of L. Hardayal, He undertook the work of bringing revolution after his return from England in 1908. His wife Smt. Ramrakhi saw him in jail and enquired about the quality of the bread he get for his meals. Bhai Balmukand showed her a specimen of the black jail bread mixed with sand,

and thereafter she also began taking bread of similar kind. Next time she visited him and asked, "Where do you sleep"? "In a dark hot cell," was the reply. And she began to sleep in a dark room under two blankets in hot summer months.

On the day her husband was hanged people came weeping to her house. She knew what had happened She took her bath, dressed and adorned herself like a bride and sat still on a rostrum in her house. She never rose again.

These martyrs of the terrorist parties who pursued their goal fearlessly and unflinchingly, and kissed the gallows smilingly gave a new hope to their countrymen ; they generated a spirit of courage and sacrifice, and inspired among their people love of their country and unique political fervour. No wonder that the British rulers had to yield, before the popular consciousness created by their sacrifices, annul the partition of Bengal and amend the Colonisation Bill of Punjab.

THE GHADAR PARTY MOVEMENT

The Ghadar Party Movement, even though it was suppressed, long before it actually came into full swing, was of greater significance and magnitude than the Ghadar of 1857. L. Hardayal was in America in 1911. He advocated armed rebellion against the British Government in India. His doctrines attracted attention and sympathies of the Indians settled in Canada and America. The prospects of the First World War raised in his heart hopes of freedom of India through Indo-German collaboration. He started the Jugantar press which began to publish the weekly "Ghadar" on November 1, 1913. L. Hardayal was Incharge of its policy. In course of time, Hindi, Urdu. Gurmukhi, Bengali and Marathi editions of the paper also made their appearance. The Marathi edition was under the charge of Vishnu Ganesh Pingale and Dr. Khan Khoje. The first issue of the paper contained the following questions and answers :

What is our name ?	Mutiny
What is our work ?	Mutiny
Where will the mutiny break out ?	In India
Why ?	Because the people can no longer bear the oppression and tyranny practised under the British Rule.

The Ghadar Party banked upon the army men for bringing about the anticipated revolution, and therefore, started smuggling this weekly into India. It was freely circulated amongst Indians settled in Burma, Siam, Shanghai, Hongkong. Malaya, Singapore, etc, and was instrumental in establishing branches of the Ghadar Party at those places. The sponsors of the movement were helped financially by the rich Indians staying in Canada and America and men like Kartar Singh

Sarabha, Pandit Ramchandra, Maulvi Barkatullah and Pandit Jagat Ram worked day and night for the party. The movement gained momentum with the beginning of the War when a fairly large number of its workers returned to India with a view to spreading it. The American Government was prevailed upon by the British to arrest L. Hardayal with a view to his deportation as an undesirable alien. He was, however, released on bail, and fled to Switzerland and from there to Germany. The Ghadar movement was reinforced by the Kamagata Maru episode. Kamagata Maru was a Japanese Steamer, chartered by Baba Gurdit Singh, a rich Contractor in Malaya, to circumvent Canadian Regulations preventing Asiatic immigrants to settle in Canada unless they travelled by a continuous journey on through tickets from their native country. It was carrying about 400 Indians, but the Canadian authorities refused it permission for landing, and forced it to return to India. The passengers, who had staked all their possessions in this venture were furious and their tempers were greatly aggravated by the revolutionary influences. They reached Budge-Budge Ghat, about 17 miles from Calcutta, on September 16, 1914, and refused to get into a special train which was to take them to Punjab. They were dragged into the train, without allowing them to touch their luggage and riots followed their resistance. Cash, cheques and bills of exchange to the value of more than a crore of rupees were confiscated. Eighteen of them, who resisted the British soldiers with arms died fighting; others were arrested and 29 of them including Baba Gurditsingh and Prithvisingh Azad escaped. This incident embittered the feelings of the Sikhs against the British and those abroad became more and more influenced by the revolutionary propaganda of the Ghadar Party. The "Ghadar" occasionally printed the following advertisement under its "Wanted" columns :

Wanted :	Enthusiastic and heroic soldiers for the Ghadar in Hindustan.
Remuneration :	Death
Reward :	Martyrdom
Pension :	Freedom
Field of work :	Hindustan

It urged the Sikhs to go back to Punjab, and help the revolutionaries in expelling the British out of India. Every home-coming ship brought hundreds of such immigrants. They came indoctrinated with ideas of Ghadar, and brought money, arms and ammunition for its accomplishment. They preached the Ghadar creed on their way and exhorted the Indians settled in Hongkong, Shanghai, Straits settlements, Batavia, Singapore, Penang, Siam, Burma, etc., to wage a ruthless war against the British rule in India. The Sikhs and Punjabi Mohammadeans dominated the Indian army, and these very communities were the back-bone of the Ghadar movement. They had, therefore, an immense capacity to spread disaffection in the Indian army and some of them infiltrated the army as recruits. The Ghadar revolutionaries were bold, fearless and defiant, and were altogether unlike the members of a secret party organisation who usually worked underground. Their plans were seldom kept secret from their followers and were in many cases carried to the Governmental authorities by their spies working among them. Railway Stations, Police Posts, means of communications such as telegraph wires were to be destroyed and military camps and checkposts were to be disorganised. Government Treasuries were to be looted and Revolutionary Camps were to be established in jungles and border areas. The British Military and the administration were to be harassed and arms and ammunition were to be captured by carrying on raids on arsenals and military camps. The Kamagata Maru, Nippon Maru and Tosa Maru were not the only ships which brought Indians back to India. The Punjab, U.P. and Bengal were literally flooded with the Ghadar revolutionaries. 3125 Punjabis returned in February 1915 alone. There was not a village in Punjab where the "Ghadar" did not reach to excite the passions of literate people and students and through them the illiterate masses. The teachers, kisans and all sorts of labourers in the villages had caught the spirit of Ghadar. Yatindranath Mukerjee from Bengal and Shachindranath Sanyal from Banaras were assisting Rash

Behari in preparing plans for the uprising. Rash Behari had his headquarters at Banaras from where he had to shift to Punjab. Pingley, who had been specially deputed by the Ghadar Party in America, was also there and he told Rash Behari that about 10 thousand Indians from abroad could easily be mustered for the purpose. Bomb Factories established at Zabewal and Lohatwadi were working round the clock ; plans for setting up Kisan Regiments were set afoot. Arms and ammunition were procured and Tri-colour National Flags, representing the colours of the three major communities, were manufactured and distributed in large quantities.

Some dacoities had to be committed by the Ghadarites in order to equip themselves with necessary funds. One of these was committed in village Papali of Hissar district, on December 17, 1914, and Pandit Kanshi Ram, one of the financiers of Ghadar movement in America alongwith six others was hanged and sentenced to death in this connection. The dacoity was in fact committed by one Gandha Singh but Pandit Kanshi Ram and his six associates were hanged instead. Later on when Gandha Singh was arrested, he too was tried and hanged. Trial of offences of a political or quasi-political nature were so speedy in these days that innocent people were also sometimes sent to gallows, without due processes of law

There was a well planned and well organised deployment of Ghadarite revolutionaries in the Indian army. Their emissaries had been sent out to various cantonments in Northern India to organise simultaneous outbreak on an appointed date.

By the end of January, Hirday Ram, who had assessed the situation in Jullundur, reported that the Dogra and other sepoys stationed there were ready to participate in rebellion. Shri Hira Singh Charar had been sent on a similar mission to Jacobabad, Bannu and Kohat. Shri Piara Singh had also gone to Kohat and Sant Gulab Singh and Harnam Singh to Bannu. The 35th Regiment at Bannu assured the revolutionaries of its support as soon as it was transferred to Rawalpindi.

Naushehra, Peshawar, Hoti Mardan and Rawalpindi centres were also contacted and gave an equally splendid response. Udham Singh of Baring and Gurmukh Singh Lalton brought the news from Rawalpindi that Indian soldiers at Jhelum, Rawalpindi, Hoti Mardan and Peshawar were ready for mutiny and were waiting anxiously for the appointed date to be communicated to them. Soldiers at Kapurthala, Meerut, Agra, Allahabad, Banaras, Ferozabad and Lucknow had also shown their readiness to take part in the rebellion at the appointed time and date.

Mula Singh was deputed to collect gangs of villagers from Lahore and Amritsar districts for making an attack on the Lahore Cantonment. Sant Vasakha Singh was deputed to Delhi to establish contacts with the soldiers there and Sucha Singh and Kartar Singh Sarabha went to Meerut. Pingale was already there and they were able to establish successfully a liaison with Shri Inder Singh and others of the 12th Cavalry. Mian Mir and Ferozepur Cantonments were however the main centres of activity in Punjab. There was a plan for a raid on the Mian Mir Magazine, but it did not materialise. Daffedar Lachhman Singh, Shri Lal Singh and Natha Singh promised to side with the rebels alongwith others, if the Revolutionary leaders came to them and discussed their plans with them at length. Shri Nidhan Singh and Shri Kartar Singh Sarabha who had been frequently visiting Ferozepur ultimately prevailed upon the soldiers of the 6th Pathan Platoon, to hand over to them the keys of the arms and ammunition depot. The soldiers at almost every military station expressed their readiness to join in revolt when the signal was given. There was general discontent among them because of the excessive loss of life among the Indian soldiers as compared with the British at the European Front. The Ghadarites were out to exploit their grievances, and with their heads literally on the palms they went about preaching murder and mutiny in every military centre. Their daring spirit and complete indifference to personal security wrought a miracle on the minds of the Indian soldiers, and February 21, 1915 was fixed as the date for an armed rebellion

throughout the country. Emissaries ran to every Cantonment and military station for conveying the appointd date. Rash Behari had finalised his plan. The uprising was to start at night when British soldiers were to be arrested and locked up. It was decided to concentrate all the power of the Ghadarites in the Punjab, which was to be turned into such a strong citadel of freedom as was impregnable to any British attack. It was expected that as soon as the uprising turned into an insurrection, Afganistan and tribal people, could be successfully persuaded to give them recognition. The British military position in India at that moment, was very weak. British soldiers had been mostly deployed for the defence of the Empire and there were only small detachments of them at the North-Western frontier. The defences were mainly in Indian hands.

But the projected rising was almost nipped in the bud. Kirpal Singh and Nawab Khan, secret agents of the Government, had joined the Ghadar movement as spies and betrayed the information to the authorities. Shri Rash Behari also came to know of the treachery of Kirpal Singh and Nawab Khan, and changed the date to the 19th of February, but the arrests of his men and soldiers compelled him and others to come to the conclusion that the best thing under the circumstances was to effect escape and evade arrest. Some of the affected platoons were disbanded. At some places both sides suffered casualties as a result of fighting that took place between the rebels and the British soldiers.

The trials of the Ghadar Party members were held in nine batches and they came to be known as Lahore Conspiracy and supplementary cases. Out of the 291 accused put on trial in these cases, 42 were sentenced to death and hanged, 114 were transported for life, 93 were imprisoned for varying terms, and 42 were acquitted.

These were not all the sentences that were awarded to the Ghadar Party men. Rebel soldiers of two regiments were tried by Court Martial and a number of murders, dacoities and train wrecking incidents were dealt with separately by ordinary

courts. The revolutionaries however refused to admit the failure of the revolution, and nothing could stop them from their activities. The Jawans of the 23rd Cavalry were transferred to a distant station, Nauganj. While detraining, some of the bombs which had been secreted for months, exploded in a packing case. They were tried by Court Martial and 18 of them were sentenced to death, out of whom 12 were actually hanged and the sentences of the rest were commuted to life imprisonment. Similar incidents continued to occur from time to time, and the idea of the unsuccessful armed revolution, therefore, remained fresh in the minds of the people. Repercussions of the Ghadar movement also took place at a number of places outside the country. The 5th Mohammedan Platoon and 35th Sikh Regiment led the revolt in Singapore. A batch of soldiers went to the camp of the German prisoners and released them. The second group went to attack the residence of the Commander of the 5th platoon, Lt. Col. Martin but in vain. The third batch roamed about the city shooting the Europeans at sight. The uprising was suppressed by the British officers with the help of Japanese and French naval forces, after the rebels had killed eight European officers, one woman, 9 soldiers and 16 citizens. The Court Martial sentenced 41 of them to death and 125 to imprisonments spread over different periods.

Siam-Burma Plan

Sohan Lal Pathak, Harnam Singh of Kahri Sahri and Bhai Santokh Singh reached Bangkok from San Francisco. Their plan was to impart military training to the Indians settled in Siam, and attack Burma with the help of the Sikh military police stationed there. Mohammedans of the Burma military police, they thought, would also join hands with them, because of the unfriendly policy pursued by the British Government towards Turkey. A railway line was being constructed in Siam under the supervision of German engineers and Bhai Santokh Singh was keeping close contacts with them. They started preparing

plans for the capture of Calcutta with the help of a force of 10,000 Bengali revolutionary volunteers. A German ship was to bring arms for the purpose, and German officers were to take up the task of imparting military training to revolutionaries in East Bengal. The scheme, however, failed to mature because the German officer who was to execute it, was arrested at Singapore and betrayed the secrets.

The movement threw up patriots of remarkable ability and passion for freedom. The achievement of each one would deserve detailed study, for the present, we can briefly highlight some of the outstanding personalities of the movement

Pt. Sohan Lal Pathak, who was the leader of the party sent to Burma, was born in Patti, district Amritsar, on January 7, 1883, and executed in Mandlay (Burma) on February 10, 1916. He was so weak at the time of his birth that even his mother was afraid to touch him with a blade of straw. When he grew up to a height of 5 feet 9 inches, he was only 82 lbs in weight. He was an associate of L. Lajpat Rai and L. Hardayal. He went to Siam in 1909 and reached America after staying in Hongkong and Manila for some time. Bhai Parmanand, a cousin of the celebrated Bhai Balmokand, was then in America. and secured him admission to the Cregon Zamindara College. But hearkening to the call of the Ghadar party, he gave up his studies, and came to stay in San Fransisco. He undertook an extensive tour of China and Malaya, collecting arms and funds and volunteers. S. Bishan Singh of Bangkok gave him Rs. 1,20,000 for the purchase of arms, and even offered to have his name inscribed on them. Wherever Shri Sohanlal went, he preached his gospel of the Revolution to the army men. The military police stationed at Singapore headquarters, came under the influence of the Ghadar Party, and rebelled. They were cordoned off with the help of 5,000 strong force of Russian, Chinese and French soldiers, but they broke through the cordon, and fled away to the jungles under the cover of darkness. They approached the Sultan of Johore to allow them passage through his territory. He agreed, and asked them to board a train bound for Siam. But he broke his word. The compartments of the train were locked and instead of proceeding to Siam, it was

turned back to Singapore where the British soldiers received them with guns. The shooting lasted for 3 days.

Pathak was inciting the Burmese soldiers to rise in rebellion, when a Havildar and a sepoy fell upon him and caught him. He was too weak to give combat even to a single man. He pleaded with them either to release him or to shoot him dead. Slim and tall like a reed, he seemed to be moving about only by force of his indomitable spirit. It seemed, he was born only to prove that the weakest and the poorest of men could have the courage to shake the foundations of the greatest of Imperialist powers. The Governor of Burma came to see him in jail and offered to release him in case he was prepared to express regrets for his revolutionary past. "The British are the tyrants in India", he said. "It is they who should feel regret, not I", he replied dauntlessly. The same offer was repeated by the Magistrate-in-charge of the Execution in Mandaley jail, at the time of his execution. Resenting the demand for the expression of regret, Sohan Lal Pathak asked, "What should I feel sorry for ? It is your arrogance which prompts you to make such a demand on me!" Nevertheless, the Magistrate was not discouraged and continued,"You should save your life ! What difference does it make if you express regret ?" Shri Pathak then asked him to give it in writing that he would be released and allowed freedom of movement in case he did so. The Magistrate, however, expressed his inability to make such a commitment in writing.

Narain Singh, Sohan Lal Pathak and Harnam Singh were executed on a charge of inciting the Indian army in Burma to rebellion.

A reign of repression and terror was let loose by the British everywhere in India and outside. Had the revolution really started,the British rulers would surely not have been in a position to withstand it. The revolutionaries had resources which could easily have lasted them for a full long year. They were moreover fully conscious of the increasing depletion in the strength of the British armed forces in India. But as explained earlier, the projected revolution did not see the light of day. It was nipped in the bud.

Sir Michael Odwyer, the notorious Punjab Governor also admitted : "Had the 1914-15 conspiracy to over-throw the British rule not been crushed, we could hardly have recruited 3 to 4 lakhs of Punjabis for being sent to war." The failure of the British to send reinforcements of lakhs of Indian soldiers to the European front would have turned the scales against them and their allies. They would not have exploited the Indian resources in men and material and the Mesopotamia campaign which depended exclusively on Indian resources would have ended in a debacle.

The plan of the Ghadar revolutionaries to overthrow the British rule was, therefore. a well-thought out and well-timed plan. It failed because of the lack of a military genius at its back. The Ghadarites moreover made some Himalayan blunders. They came to India by beat of drum. They set to work among the army men without caring to maintain even a show of secrecy. They were so bold and courageous in their contacts with Indian soldiers, that they openly talked of murders, loot and rebellion. They practised little or no caution. Their calculations about the requirement of arms, and money were also not based on any exact statistical data. But in spite of all these limitations, they had every hope of success, because the circumstances were most favourable to them. On the other hand, the laxity in their organisation may be gauged from the fact that Kirpal Singh, the secret agent, who had joined the Ghadarites on February 13, 1915, was able to find his way into the inner circles of the Party in less than a week.

Their success was in fact assured by the splendid response which the Indian soldiers gave to their call for rebellion. The situation had become so explosive that the news of the revolt of a single Indian army unit, would have released a chain reaction throughout the country, and it would have become almost impossible to stem the tide. The British could have at last rallied round themselves a class of lackeys and their agents, or princes and jagirdars, but these men would have never dared to oppose the armed forces led by their own countrymen, even if the latter had only a remote chance of success. There was

a universal opposition to the British rule, though it was expressed only in muffled tones, and everyone was happy at the news of the German successes in the War. The popular sentiment, in other words, was totally anti-British.

Dr. Pandurang Sadashiv Khankhoje.

One of the founders of the Ghadar movement, belonged to Nagpur Pradesh. The personality of Lokmanya Tilak inspired him. At his initiative he went abroad to get training in arms and science. He reached America in 1908. At Berkley he met Surendra Mohan Bose, Adhar Chandra Lashkar, Khagan Dass, Tarak Nath Dass and other well-settled Indian leaders. Khankhoje succeed in getting admission into a Military Academy. He founded the Indian Independence League in California, and then went to Portland. At Portland he met Pandit Kanshi Ram who had made a fortune in Lumber Mill contracts. Panditji gave all his earnings to the Ghadar movement, and dedicated his life to the work of the Ghadar Party. Dr. Khankhoje led the agitation against the Asiatic Immigration Act promulgated in 1909. Similar legislation was passed by the Canadian Government in May, 1910. Vishnu Ganesh Pingale, an Engineering student, also joined Pandit Kanshi Ram and Dr. Khankhoje. In view of inflitration of all sorts of elements in the Ghadar Party, it was divided into two sections ; one dealing with the propaganda side (including publication of the "Ghadar" newspaper) and the other with activities of a more serious nature. Dr. Khankhoje was Incharge of the latter ; "Action" as it was called.

Vishnu Ganesh Pingale was in the first batch of Ghadarites returning to India. Both he and Kartar Singh Sarabha had confessed their complicity in the Lahore Conspiracy Case. When the Judge delivered his judgment in the first of these Cases (first batch) Kartar Singh, Pingale and others sentenced to death were extremely happy at the award and those who were awarded life imprisonments requested the court to also enhance their punishments to sentences of death. As chance

would have it, Pingale was the last to be sent to the gallows. The officer-in-charge said to him. "I tried to give you as much of a span of life as I could. I deliberately kept your name at the end." Pingale with a sense of humour replied, "You made a mistake, sir! It is likely to have created apprehensions in the minds of my comrades that I was lagging behind. Had I been sent earlier to the other world, I should have made magnificent arrangements for their reception and stay there!" Asked about his last desire, he made a request for the removal of his handcuffs so that he could pray with both hands joined. When his wish was acceded to, he loudly offered the following prayer, "O, Lord! You know our hearts' desire. Our only prayer is that you fulfil the mission for the sake of which we have sacrificed our lives!"

Shri Gandha Singh. A prominent member of the Ghadar Party in America Gandha Singh was born in village Kacharman. On his return journey he was able to save a large number of Sikh patriots from falling into the hands of the Indian police, by persuading them to change their landing place. He was absolutely certain about the fate he was going to meet immediately after landing in India. Death was the logical consequence of the course he had chosen to adopt and there was nothing to dissuade him from his choice. He took part in the Ghadar work with an impassioned zeal and had the first encounter with the police near village Ghalkhurd. The police Sub-Inspector slapped and abused one of his young associates. The young man felt humiliated but helpless. The instant Gandha Singh saw tears in his eyes, he took up his aim and the offending Sub-Inspector fell dead to the ground.

Shri Vishnu Ganesh Pingale, belonged to the hilly area of Poona. He had gone to America for studies in Engineering and it was there that he was initiated to the Ghadar movement. He returned to India and threw himself heart and soul to work for the Ghadar, and tried to bring about a collaboration between the revolutionaries of Punjab and Bengal. He established contacts with Rash Behari Bose for procuring a large number

of bombs for the Punjab, and reported the Punjab situation to him. He visited Amritsar alongwith Shachindra Nath Sanyal. Pingale and Kartar Singh were the main actors at the Punjab revolutionary stage.

On his way to Banaras with Rash Behari Bose, Pingale got down at Meerut Cantt.,in order to do propaganda among the soldiers there. A Mohammedan Havildar who had managed to earn his confidence, accompanied him later to Banaras. The discerning eye of Rash Behari soon found out that he was a rather doubtful man, and warned Pingale to beware of him. But Pingale persisted in going back to Meerut for completing his unfinished work and was at last allowed by Rash Behari to go. The said Havildar got Pingale arrested alongwith a large number of bombs as soon as he was back in Meerut. According to the Rowlatt report the quality of these bombs was such that even one of them was sufficient to annihilate half a regiment. He was sent to the gallows on November 16, 1915. When he stood at the gallows, he was asked if he wanted anything. "God knows our hearts," he said, "May He bring success to the sacred cause for which we are sacrificing our lives. The freedom of India is our only desire"

Bhai Balwant Singh was born in village Khurdpur, district Jullundar. He went to Canada in 1905 and the first Gurdwara in those parts of the world was established in Vancouver mainly due to his efforts. He was a great fighter for the cause of Indian immigrants and combined in him the qualities of a good general and a staunch religious preceptor. He was an outspoken opponent of the Immigration Officer, Mr. Hopkins, who was known for his anti-Indian attitude. Bela Singh, an agent of the said official, fired two shots to kill him and his associate Bhag Singh The latter fell dead on the spot but the shot aimed at Balwant Singh missed the mark and killed Wattan Singh instead

Balwant Singh, then, boarded the Kamagata Maru for his return to India, but decided to stay at Shanghai to organise the Ghadar work there. In 1915, he went to Bangkok. There

he was taken severely ill, but immediately after his discharge from the hospital, he was arrested by the Siam police and handed over to the British authorities at Singapore. He was brought to India and tried in the second batch of the Lahore Conspiracy Case prisoners in 1916. He was sentenced to death. His wife came to see him in jail. His books and clothes were handed over to her, and she was told about the date and time when her husband was hanged. At the last moment, he took his bath, bowed his head to Mother India in reverence, and singing the song of liberty, went smilingly to the scaffold. He and six other comrades were hanged that day.

There is no end to the stories of these revolutionaries who kissed the hangman's rope with the name of Mother India on their lips.

Whence came these mad men, who neither loved their life nor feared their death ; who went smilingly to the battle-field and gave their necks for the halter as if bowing to receive a garland ? One is over whelmed by their immortal spirit, lofty idealism and exuberant enthusiasm. Many out of them had gone abroad, and seen for themselves the humiliating treatment meted out to Indians in foreign countries, only because they happend to be the citizens of a slave land. They compared the plight of their people with those that were free and independent, and resolved to spare nothing for the cause of the freedom of their Motherland. When the call for return to India was given, these men came pouring in. The rich offered everything they had and those on whom fortune had not been so kind were no less enthusiastic. A large number of these patriots gave up huge fortunes and flourishing businesses to get only self-sought death sentences in exchange.

They failed to achieve their object, largely because they relied mainly on the Indian soldiers who were to rise in revolt simultaneously on the appointed day, and did nothing to prepare the masses for the projected revolution. People were generally not conscious of the wrongs British Imperialism had

done to their nation and could easily be exploited by the wily rulers. There was, in fact, a wide gap in the outlook of the politically conscious Indians who led the revolt here and abroad and the general masses, who still had wrong notions about the sense of British justice and fairplay or were dazed by the civilization and institutions of industrialised Europe.

The differences between a popular uprising and a revolution brought about with the help of disaffected soldiers is great. When an army takes the initiative and indeed leads a revolution, it accomplishes a "coup." A popular uprising however, may take long to come; it comes only after the people have become fully conscious, and participate enthusiastically in the struggle. The 1914-15 was neither a popular uprising nor the revolt of a disaffected soldiery. It was in fact the revolt of the politically conscious men and was born out of their contacts with free and independent countries. It was the revolt of the inspired and brave people, to whom slavery meant nothing but mental agony. None could be mentally better suited for the revolution than they. They had yet to awaken the masses from their more than a century old slumber, and this could be done only by greater sacrifices, wider national effort, and a bigger dive into the Jaws of death ! This national conciousness was brought about in the course of the years that followed. A large majority of their countrymen do not even to this time know how these brave men succeed in bringing their country almost to the verge of a great revolution. It was only a chance that saved the British rule in India, and gave it a fresh lease of life for another 30 or so years. The British rulers had by now seen that the masses had become even more critical of their regime, and were attracted more and more towards agitations against it. The Government, therefore, adopted measures aimed at ruthless suppression of the revolutionaries, their kith and kin, their friends and their sympathisers. The suppression was not only confined to punishments through courts, but it also took the form of ruining them financially and depriving them of all sources of livelihood.

Confiscation of the property of workers of the revolutionary party and the Indian National Congress was usually resorted to, and their relatives wholly unconnected with the movement were also not spared. The object was primarily to crush the spirit of the people.

Thakur Kesri Singh, a great patriot and political sufferer had been sentenced to life imprisonment in a political case of Kotah. His brother Thakur Zorawar Singh and all his other relatives, who were big Jagirdars, were deprived of all their property. Warrants of arrest of all his male relatives were issued. His son Kanwar Partap Singh however, escaped alongwith his uncle and was with Master Amir Chand at Delhi only a few days before the latter's arrest. He was also implicated in the Hardinge Bomb Case of 1912 and arrested. The great family of Thakur Kesri Singh was so persecuted that almost all of them were reduced to paupers. The mother of Partap Singh passed her last days in great misery. She went to live with her parents but they were also deprived of their belongings. She then took refuge in the house of another distant relative, but found circumstances so hard for her that she once made an unsuccessful attempt at suicide.

After Partap Singh had been arrested, the police tried him to disclose all the secrets of the revolutionary party, and exerted every possible pressure on him. They reminded him of the pitiable condition of his mother and warned him about what might befall her at the news of his arrest and conviction. They promised that if he told them everything the confiscated property of all his relatives would be restored, his father, serving life imprisonment, would be released, and all his worries would come to an end. Partap Singh was not ready even to listen to such blandishments and answered proudly, "I have given enough thought to your offer. I am unable to accept it. The reason is that at present it is only my mother who suffers, but if I were to betray the secrets to you, many more mothers would have to suffer. I cannot be the cause of the agony of so many mothers, for the sake of wiping out the tears of my mother alone!"

This ruthless repression, however, did not stop the revolutionary movement from spreading. On December 10, 1917, the Government appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rowlatt, with the object of dealing effectively with revolutionary crimes. It recommended the enactment of Special Legislation for setting up special courts to try cases of sedition. The officials were given powers to intern suspected persons or remove them from their places and deport them elsewhere. A person accused of anarchical or revolutionary activities was not to be given the right to an open trial or to appear at all the stages of the proceedings of his case. He was neither allowed to be represented by a counsel nor was his right to examine any witness or produce any document recognised. The recommendations were subversive of the principles of liberty and justice and destructive of the elementary rights of individuals, and the popular slogan of "No appeal, No Vakil, No Dalil" was a correct description of the whole situation. The Rowlatt Acts were passed in the teeth of strong opposition by the non-official members of the Indian Legislative Assembly and threw the country into a whirlpool of agitation. Riots occurred in the Punjab, when Sir Michael O'dwyer, the Lieut. Governor ruled with an iron hand. The Muslims who were greatly excited over the Khilafat Movement, also supported this agitation against the Rowlatt Acts, and disturbances broke out in Ahmedabad (in Bombay Presidency) Delhi, Lahore, Amritsar and at other places in Punjab. Riots continued for two days in Ahmedabad where the troops resorted to firing, killing 29 and injuring 123 persons. 13 Government buildings including courts, etc., were distroyed and telegraph wires cut at several places. A Magistrate was killed in disturbances at Viramgaum. On April 9, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal, Punjab Congress leaders, were arrested under the Defence of India Act and ordered for deportation. This action of the Government infuriated the masses who declared an immediate Hartal and marched in a procession to the D.C.'s bungalow to demand their release. The Government tried to

force it back by resorting to firing. It, therefore, struck back by adopting a course of destruction, revenge, murder and arson. The European Manager and the Assistant Manager of the National Bank were mobbed and put to death. The buildings of the Bank as well as of the Town Hall and the Post Office were set to fire and the godowns of the Alliance Bank were looted. On April 12, a C.I.D. officer was assaulted by the mob at Lahore, when a public meeting was being held in Badshahi mosque. A procession marching through Hira Mandi, Lahore, was stopped by troops and fired upon. It injured 20 and killed Khushi Ram, a promising young man of 19 who was leading the procession. When he saw the people running away in panic due to firing, he roared like a lion exhorting them to die like brave sons of India, and not run away like cowards. Thus moved by his words, the people stood firm. Nawab Mohammad Ali, again issued a warning. The bullets followed and oneof them hit the chest of Khushi Ram. He moved one step forward and received another bullet. He continued moving, and receiving bullets at every step. In all he received seven bullets in his chest. The eighth one struck him in the forehead, and he could move no further. He fell down dead.

The massacre of innocent and unarmed persons gathered in a public meeting in the Jallianwala Bagh by General Dyer occurred on April 13, 1919,the bloody Baisakhi Day as it is called. 1650 rounds were fired, killing 350 and wounding 1,200 persons. Martial Law was declared on April 15, 1919. The humiliating orders to crawl, to salute and to answer the roll call ; the indiscriminate floggings, arrests and confiscations were some of the measures adopted by the authorities to deal with the rioters. Chaudhri Rambhaj Datt, L. Harkishanlal and L. Dunichand were deported. A large number of arrests were made. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre was a turning point in the history of the Punjab, nay India. The tradition of loyalty to the British Crown was shattered beyond repair.

Dyer, testifying before the Disorders Enquiry Committee appointed by the Government, said,"It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowds, but one of producing a sufficient effect from a military point of view, not only on those who were present, but more especially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity."

Mahatma Gandhi was in the forefront in the anti-Rowlatt Bill agitation. He had successfully led a non-violent agitation in South Africa in 1906 and now he had a much wider field for carrying out a similar experiment. For him the struggle for independence here closely related to the moral and social education of the masses. He felt that the Government which could perpetrate such terrible wrongs must be evil in nature and decided to disassociate himself from it in all possible ways. He became a non-cooperator and the whole country joined him in this movement, whose programme was chalked out in a Special Session of the Congress held at Calcutta in 1920, under the presidentship of Lala Lajpat Rai. Boycott of foreign goods, courts, schools, colleges, Legislative Councils and Government services, etc, was resorted to. Titles were surrendered and national schools and colleges were established. Nine years later the Congress at its Lahore Session in 1929 held under the presidentship of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, passed a resolution declaring complete Independence for India as the goal of the Congress, and gave up the earlier demand for Dominion Status. 26th January 1930 was celebrated by the Congress as Independence Day throughout the country and the stage was set for the launching of the 2nd great national movement for the attainment of Swaraj. The Civil Disobedience Movement was started by Mahatma Gandhi and it reached its climax in 1942. On the historic day of August 8, 1942, the Congress adopted the "Quit India" Resolution and called upon the countrymen to assert their will against an imperialist and authoritarian Government in a last bid in their struggle for Independence. The anarchical and revolutionary activities of the terrorists, however, continued unabated alongside the non-violent non-cooperation movement of the Gandhian era.

As a result of these activities the masses were becoming more and more politically conscious; the Government also started realising that use of brute force would not cow down the new India that had arisen. The greater the repression used by the Government to crush the movement, the more the momentum it gained. Attempt on the life of the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Franster, the Maniktala Conspiracy Case and the supplementary Maniktala Case, the conspiracy cases in Dacca and Barisal, the murders of D.S.P. Suresh Mukerji and D.S.P. Basant Chatterji and the shooting down of the District Magistrate Commilla by two girls are some of the incidents that took place in Bengal. The most daring of them was the Chittagong Armoury Raid (April 19, 1930) when 125 terrorists under the command of Major Surya Sen and Capt. Chatterji carried out a raid on Chittagong Armoury. One of their batches raided the telephone exchange, and succeeded in cutting off all communications connecting the town with Calcutta and Dacca. The second one saw to the severing of rail connections, which resulted in the derailment of some goods-trains, and the consequent blocking of all railway traffic. The third one raided the premises of the club, but failing to find any of the officials there, joined the main group. The store of the Auxiliary Force was attacked, and a stock of rifles, pistols, revolvers,cartridges and a Lewis gun were seized. While on their way back, they were pursued by a Gurkha platoon under the command of Farmer Johnson with machine gun fire. The revolutionaries fired back in self-defence, and ultimately succeeded in getting out of the limits of the town. They took up positions behind a mountain ridge, and gave a pitched battle to the pursuing platoon. The latter lost about 50 of its men in the encounter, and was reinforced by a fresh batch the following day. The revolutionaries lost 30 of their men.

Twelve more of the revolutionaries were killed in another encounter that took place on April 22, between the military and such of them as had been able to break through the cordon.

The third one occurred on May 6, when Devi Gupta, Manoranjan Sen, Rajat Sen, Sudesh Rai and Amrendra Nandi attained their martyrdom. Others were arrested by the police and put up for trial before a Special Tribunal.

The trial began on July 1930, and continued for 29 months. Anant Singh, Ganesh Singh, Loknath Pal, Anand Gupta, Fanindra Nandi, Subodh Choudhari, Sahay Ramdas, Faqir Sen, Lalmohan Sen, Sukhendu Dastgir, Subodh Rai, and Randhir Dass Gupta were transported for life to Andamans. Anil Bandhudas and Nanda Sinha got 2 years R. I. each, and the other 19 were acquitted for want of evidence. Their leader, Surya Sen, was encircled by the police on May 16, 1933, alongwith his comrades Prasanna Taluqdar, Tarkeshwar Dastgir, Sudhendra Das and Kalpana Datt. He was arrested alongwith Kalpana and Dastgir while others died fighting. Tarkeshwar Dastgir and Surya Sen were sentenced to death and hanged, whilst Kalpana was transported for life.

Chittagong Armoury Raid was the biggest terrorist action ever organised. It shook the administration from head to foot, and gave encouragement to the terrorists all over India. A wave of terrorist reprisals followed in its train. On September 8, 1930, Mr. Simpson, the Inspector General of Prisons, was killed by Vinay Krishna Bose, Sudhir Kumar Gupta and Dinesh Gupta.

On September 24, 1931, two teen-aged girl-students, Miss Shanta Ghosh and Sumati Chowdhri of the Government High School shot the District Magistrate of Tipperah. On April 30, 1935, the District Magistrate of Midnapur was similarly shot dead by Pradip Kumar Bhattacharji, who as a consequence was hanged on June 18, 1935. Capt. Kemson was killed in his attempt to arrest Nirmal Chandra Sen of the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case. On September 2, 1933, the District Magistrate of Midnapur, Mr. Burge, was shot dead, and 11 persons were arrested, 3 of whom were sentenced to death and 4 were transported for life.

In Maharashtra, the Collector of Nasik Mr. Jackson was murdered on December 21, 1909. Anant Laxman Kanhere, Krishna Gopal Karve, and Vinayak Narayan Deshpande were sentenced to death in this case. Kanhere was a member of the Abhinav Bharat and worked in Aurangabad area. He was a handsome innocent looking young man in teens. It was difficult to believe that an iron will and death defying courage could dwell in such a quiet and gentle temperament. He addressed the court in the course of his statement : "I have done my duty. Whereas your administration condemns a patriot like Shri Ganesh Damodar Savarkar to transportation for life, it provides all the comforts and luxuries to an Executive Engineer, Mr. Williams who causes the death of a poor Indian cartman. It is for this that I have killed Jackson. I have no desire to run away."

Mainpuri Conspiracy Case

Genda Lal Dikhshit, born on November 30,1888, in Mainpuri district Agra, started a secret organisation called Matruvedi, for carrying on revolutionary propaganda in the army. He had collected about 80 of his associates in a jungle, in connection with a plot, when they were betrayed to the police by one of them. An encounter followed, wherein 34 of the revolutionaries were killed, Pt. Genda Lal and others were captured and brought to Gwalior fort. A raid was organised by his followers in order to secure their release but as a result of its failure, some more revolutionaries were arrested. All those persons were put up for trial in the Mainpuri Conspiracy Case. Genda Lal got some facilities in the jail on a promise to turn an approver and thus managed to effect his escape, from the prison. He could not be caught again.

Such of the revolutionaries as were not in favour of individual acts of terrorism founded a separate organisation under the name of the Hindustan Republic Association. They aimed at overthrowing the British rule by an armed revolution.

Shachindra Nath Sanyal and Yogesh Chander Chatterji were its moving figures. In 1925, they issued "the Manifesto Revolutionary" and circulated it very widely all over India.

Kakori Conspiracy Case

On August 9, 1925, Ram Parshad Bismil, Ashfaqullah, Rajendra Nath Lahiri, Murari Sharma, Mukundi Lal, Shachindra Bakshi, Manmathnath Gupta, Banwarilal and Chander Shekhar Azad decided to finance their revolutionary scheme by committing, among others, a dacoity in Saharanpur-Lucknow running train. They equipped themselves with arms, ammunition and tools for forcing open the iron chests and stopped the train near Kakori Railway Station by pulling the alarm chain. They went straight to the compartment containing Government treasury and over-powered the gaurds. While Ashfaqullah stood guard, others started breaking open the chest with the help of chisels and hammers. In vain did they keep on striking, then Ashfaqullah leaving his post to Manmathnath Gupta, came to their help. He was a giant, with unbounded strength, and strokes delivered from his hand soon threw the chest open. Having collected all the money lying therein they fled to safety. They were later on arrested and put up for trial. Bismil, Ashfaqullah, Roshansingh and Rajindra Lahiri got death sentences. Shachindra Nath Sanyal and Shachindra Nath Bakshi were sentenced to transportation for life, Manmathnath Gupta to 14 years rigorous imprisonment and Gobind Charankar, Raj Kumar Singh and Ramkrishan Khatri to 10 years each. The rest of them were sentenced to imprisonments ranging from 3 to 7 years. Such was the end of their heroic attempt, to secure money for the purchase of a big consignment of arms and ammunition that was being smuggled into the country in a foreign ship.

Pandit Ram Parahad Bismil was born in 1900 in Gwaliar State. He received his inspiration and guidance from Pandit Genda Lal Dikhshit, He was a great poet and an equally great writer. He,however,gave up his pen and took to the sword. He was executed on December 19, 1927, in Gorakhpur Jail.

Rajendra Lahiri was a M.A. student and was sent to the gallows on December 17, 1927. Thakur Roshan Singh belonged to a Jagirdar family of Navada district. Born with a silver spoon in mouth, he adopted the road to service and sacrifice, and was awarded a sentence of death, which was carried out on December 19, in Allahabad Jail. Ashfaqullah belonged to a well-to-do Pathan family of Shahjahanpur. He was a great nationalist Muslim, whose heart burned at the sight of Mother India in bondage. He, too, was a revolutionary poet like Bismil. He suffered martyrdom at the gallows in Faizabad Jail on December 17, 1927. Chandra Shekhar Azad, the youngest of the Kakori Case heroes was declared an absconder. The Police could not arrest him.

Yogesh Chandra Chatterji, one of the founders of the Hindustan Socialist Republic Association was arrested at Howrah Railway Station on October 19, 1924. Papers were found on his person which contained a good deal of information regarding the 23 branches of this Association. He was at first clapped up in a prison under the Bengal Ordinance, and then implicated in the Kakori Case. He was awarded a sentence of ten years rigorous imprisonment.

Akali and Babbar Akali Movement

The Mahants (high priests) in the Gurdwaras lived a luxurious life and the one, at Nankana Sahib, Naraindass by name, openly kept a concubine. She belonged to the Mirasi community, and used to give her dance performances in the precincts of the Gurdwara itself. It was the same with the Mahants in some of the other Gurdwaras. A social and religious movement for the reform of the Gurdwaras was, therefore, started by the puritan Sikhs When the agitation was in full swing, Mahant Naraindass, hatched a plot to kill several of them after enticing them into the Gurdwara. He had collected a large number of bad characters armed with deadly weapons, who on February 20, 1921, fell upon a Jatha of 150 Sikhs led by Bhai Lachhman Singh of Dharowal and attacked

it with fire-arms, swords, axes, etc., whilst its members were busy offering prayers. Their dead bodies were cut into pieces, and burnt to ashes with Kerosen oil. Bhai LachhmanSingh and some others were burnt alive. Quite a number of persons, who were standing outside the Gurdwara,were also killed and thrown into the burning furnaces. Bhai Dalip Singh, one of the leaders of the movement and a friend of the Mahant, tried to stop him from committing such heinous atrocities, but the Mahant was too arrogant to listen to advice. He had him shot dead instantly, and threw his dead body also into the burning furnace.

The Mahant at Guru-ka-Bagh had agreed to hand over the management of the Gurdwara to an eleven-member Committee appointed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, but backed out from his agreement after the Nankana Sahib episode. Akali volunteers thereupon began courting arrests in large numbers by refusing to recognise the Mahant's proprietary rights over the lands attached to the Gurdwara Jathas would start every morning from Sri Akal Takht, Amritsar and proceed to the Guru-ka-Bagh with the object of asserting their birthright to cut off fire wood for the Gurdwara kitchen. The wily Mahant applied for intervention by the Police which started stopping them on their way, and giving them merciless beating. The doctors and cars usually followed the Jathas for bringing the injured for medical treatment. After a few days, on August 9, 1922, the Government started making arrests and continued doing so up to October 17, 1922, when Sir Ganga Ram got the land in question leased out to him, and wrote to the Government that he did not require any help from the police Five thousand six hundred and five persons had been arrested in Guru-ka-Bagh alone. In all, about 40,000 persons were arrested in the Akali movement. 500 of them suffered martyrdom.

A Babbar Akali Dal (force) was raised with a view to continuing the work of the 1914-15 revolutionaries and to avenging the excesses perpetrated on the Akalis. They went about from

place to place preaching sedition and spreading disaffection. They decided to terrorise and demoralize such of the agents of the British rulers like the Lambardars, Sufaid Poshes, Police Informers, and spies etc. as were likely to betray the national cause. At first they would let off these traitors by only cutting off their limbs or depriving them of a nose or an ear. Later on they decided not to spare them, and some murders were also committed.

Jathedar Kishansingh was the moving force behind the Babbar Akali Movement. The Government also perfected its machinery to attack and crush these Babbars. It exerted all its pressure on the people in the villages not to give them any quarter, nor help them in any form or manner. They were not to be given any food to eat or water to drink. Secret police agents were spread over the villages to keep a watch over the inhabitants, and arms licenses were freely distributed among the lackeys of the government. The latter, however, still felt insecure, and quite a few of them met the fate which they so richly deserved. Kishansingh Gargaj, Sundersingh, Karamsingh, Udesingh, Bishansingh, Channasingh, Bantasingh, Dhanua. Singh, Waryam singh, Jawala singh Kotla, Santa Singh, Dalip Singh Nandsingh, Karamsingh were some of the leading members of the Dal, who carried on their daring activities through revolutionary propaganda, public speeches and gradual elimination of the secret police agents.

On September 1, 1923, a batch of Babbar Akalis comprising Karamsingh, Udesingh, Bishansingh and Mohindersingh died fighting at Bomeli, near Kapurthala, when a police party tried to capture them. Dhannasingh was betrayed by one of his associates, Jawalasingh. He happened to have a bomb in his pocket, which he exploded thereby killing himself as well as Mr. Horton and six other policemen.

91 Babbar Akalis were tried in the Babbar Akalli Case. 3 of them died during the trial, 12 were sentenced to transportation after life and 38 to different periods of imprisonment. Kishan-

singh, Dharamsingh, Santasingh, Nandasingh, Dalipsingh and Karamsingh were sentenced to death and executed on February 27, 1926, the Holi Day. The Akali movement thus lasted from 1920 to 1926. It was originally a Movement for Gurdwara Reform but with the intervention of the Government on the side of the Mahants and its decision to deprive Maharaja Ripudamansingh of Nabha of his *gadi*, it took the shape of an anti-Government movement. A large number of the Sikhs suffered martyrdom in both the Akali and the Nabha agitation.

As a result of the glowing sacrifices made by the patriots in India and abroad, the whole country was seething with rebellion. No sacrifice was too dear and no suffering too hard for these men who were moved by the sole desire to see their country free of foreign domination. A stage had been reached when the youth of the country felt that unless patriotism became militant and regimented, it would not be possible to oust foreigners from a position of entrenched supremacy. This movement produced the Prince among patriots, Sardar Bhagat Singh.

NAUJAWAN BHARAT SABHA

Sardar Bhagat Singh was the founder of the organisation which instilled revolutionary ideas among the youth of the country, and prepared them for the coming struggle. This was known as the Naujawan Bharat Sabha. It enjoyed a brief existence from 1927 to 1931.

The Hindustan Socialist Republican Army

The National Movement spread like a prairie fire during the years 1919-1942. It set the whole country ablaze. Great intellectuals, powerful orators and distinguished writers had by now joined the Indian National Congress. Leaders like Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. C.R. Dass, Subhash Chandra Bose, Maulana Azad, Lala Lajpat Rai inspired and urged the masses towards their destined goal. They were men who created history by forging unity amongst the people and thus made them strong enough to wrest freedom from unwilling hands.

It was also a period prolific in great terrorist activities. Chandra Shekhar Azad, Bhagwati Charan, Bhagat Singh and scores of other revolutionaries were feverishly active during this period with their plans to paralyse the out-worn administration. Bhagat Singh, Shiv Varma and others contacted the revolutionaries in Bengal, U.P. and Punjab, and on September 8 & 9, 1929, called a meeting at Delhi of the workers of all the secret societies all over the country. This meeting was held at the ruins of Kotla Ferozeshah. Kundan Lal Sharma came from Rajasthan, and Shiv Varma, Brahmdutt Misra, Jaidev, Vijay Kumar Sinha and Surendra Pande from U. P. Manmohan Bannerji and Manindra Nath Ghosh from Bihar attended by special invitation. Shri Chandra Shekhar Azad, the most inspiring of the revolutionaries, was present at Delhi for consultation and guidance, but did not personally go to the meeting place. Bhagat Singh and Shiv Varma, however, met him on behalf of others, and discussed matters with him. No one was there to represent the Bengal Anushilan Samiti.

This meeting decided to constitute a Central Committee with the object of unifying and centralising the work of all the revolutionary parties in the country. This new organisation was christened as the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. It also decided to raise an army of daring and dependable young men for effecting an armed revolution and to raise funds for this purpose, by organising raids on banks, post offices and government treasuries. It did not think it worthwhile for the workers to fritter away their energies in attempts on the lives of petty government officers or police informers and advised them not to resort to this course any more. It also took stock of the growing opposition of the country to the visit of the Simon Commission and the determination of the Government to go ahead with it. The Commission reached Lahore on October 20, 1928, when a huge procession greeted it with a black flag demonstration and deafening cries of "Go back Simon." As the procession was winding its way towards the Railway Station, the police tried to disperse it by ordering it to clear off the roads. The mass of the processionists, however, was so large that it was wellnigh impossible to effect a way through it. The whole of the city population appeared to have come out of their homes to join the procession ; which was surging forward like the waves of a mighty sea. L. Lajpat Rai led the procession. The police, therefore, resorted to a free use of lathis and batons and many were injured as a result of it. The profuse bleeding of the innocent and peaceful demonstrators failed to produce any effect on the police, and they continued their charge in a frantic bid to make the procession disperse. A batch of young revolutionaries formed a protective cordon around Lala Lajpat Rai with a view to shielding him against any possible attack. This enraged Mr. Scott, the Superintendent of Police,and he gave orders for indiscriminate lathi charge on these protectors. Mr. Saunders himself began to beat Lalaji with his baton ; and blows were aimed at his head and chest. Lalaji realised that a serious situation had developed, that was likely to lead to bloodshed on a large scale.

He, therefore, persuaded the people to disperse. At a public meeting held in the evening, to protest against the lathi charge, the Punjab Lion roared thus : "The Government which attacks its own innocent subjects has no claim to be called a civilised government. Bear in mind, such a government does not survive long. I declare that the blows struck at me will be the last nails in the coffin of the British rule in India."

The blows on the chest of Lalaji inflicted a permanent injury upon his heart, as a result of which the great patriot died on November 17, 1928.

The revolutionaries, in a meeting held at Lahore, decided to avenge the murder of their great and undisputed leader by killing both Scott and Saunders. Chandra Shekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Kailashpati, Mahavir Singh, Kundanlal, Shivram Rajguru, Yashpal and some others participated in the meeting which took this decision. On December 17, 1928, just a month after the death of the Sher-i-Punjab Mr. Saunders was killed in front of the police station near the D.A.V. College, Lahore. Azad, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Jai Gopal carried out the action .

No one was arrested at the spot. They left Lahore one by one.

At the Calcutta Session of the Congress, S. Bhagat Singh came in contact with Shri Jitendra Nath Dass, who agreed to train the members of the Central Committee in the making of bombs and explosives. Bhagat Singh, Kamalnath Tiwari, Vijay Kumar Sinha and Fanindra Ghosh went through the course and started a bomb factory at Agra.

The bombs that were thrown in the Central Assembly by S. Bhagat Singh and his companion Mr. Bhatkeshwar Datt were the products of this factory. They had exploded them by way of warning to the British rulers against their proposed repressive measures like the Public Safety Act and the Trades Disputes Act. These bills had been rejected by the Central Assemby but were enacted by the Governor General by the use of his special powers. The explosion occurred as soon as the Governor

General's assent to the two of them was Communicated to the House. Simultaneously, both Bhagat Singh and Dutt shouted at the top of their voice, "Long Live Revolution! Down with Imperialism ! Workers of the world Unite!" and, thereafter, offered themselves for arrest. The statement they gave immediately after their arrest dealt at length with the motives that had prompted them to choose the Central Legislature for this incident.

A little after this incident, Sukhdev set up a Bomb Factory in the Kashmiri Building at Lahore. Pandit Kishorilal, one of his associates was once noticed by the police, carrying some empty shells and the police followed him in his track, and thus got a clue to the factory. The shells were of the same type as were used in the Central Assembly and a number of arrests were therefore effected. The trial began on July 10, 1929 in the court of Mr. Sirikishan, a Special Magistrate. Charges were framed against 32 persons but 7 of them turned approvers, and 9 including Chandra Shekhar Azad, Bhagwati Charan and Yashpal were declared absconders.

The treatment accorded to the political prisoners under trial in those days was so insulting and inhuman that S. Bhagat Singh and his comrades refused to put up with it, and made a demand for an immediate change therein. They resorted to hunger-strike in order to enforce their demand. The Government made no response, and resorted instead to forcible feeding of the hunger-strikers. This was a very painful method and Jatindra Nath Dass died as a result of a complication arising out of it. A few days before his death, the Government offered to release him on condition that somebody stood surety for his conduct, but Das would not agree to any conditions being attached to the offer. He was a prince among the revolutionaries who stood firm like a rock by his cause, and never allowed any weak sentiments to shake him from his resolve. He suffered martyrdom on September 13, at 10 p.m. Immediately after the incident, the Government introduced the Hunger Strikes

Bill in the Central Assembly, with a view to authorising the courts to continue with the trial before them even if the accused could not be present for some reason or another. The Governor General in the meanwhile issued an Ordinance whereby the trial of this case was passed to a specially constituted Tribunal, against whose judgment there lay no right of appeal. This Tribunal, moreover, was empowered to proceed with the cases even if the accused could not be present. It started the trial on May 5, 1930. The accused appeared before it and started raising revolutionary slogans immediately as they entered the court room. They were mercilessly beaten by the police in the presence of the Judges, who stood by like ordinary spectators. As a protest against this high-handedness of the police and callous indifference of the Tribunal, the accused gave up attending the court. They declared that they would attend only if Justice Coldstream, the Chairman of the Tribunal, expressed regrets for this Occurrence and Justice Agna Hyder, the other Judge of the Tribunal resigned his membership thereof. Both of them decided on grounds of health, to proceed on leave and the accused started attending the court after an absence of 41 days. Their boycott, however, had to be resumed because the facilities granted to them were suddenly withdrawn after they decided to assert their right of raising revolutionary slogans on entering into the court premises. The trial, therefore, continued without the presence of the accused, or their lawyers, and the judgment was delivered on October 7, 1930. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were sentenced to death, Kishorilal, Mahavirsingh, Vijay Kumar Sinha, Shiv Varma, Gaya Parshad and Kamalnath Tewari were transported for life ; Kundanlal and Premdutt were awarded 7 and 5 years rigorous imprisonment respectively ; Ajay Kumar Ghosh, Jitendranath Sanyal aud Desraj were acquitted and Brahmdutt and Ramsarandass, the two approvers, were ordered to be retried. The time and date of the execution was not intimated to the families of the condemned prisoners. They died at the gallows at 7-28 on the evening of March 23, 1931, shouting "Long Live Revolution" and "Down with Imperialism."

Jagdish Chandra another front rank revolutionary, was killed in the Shalimar Gardens of Lahore on May 7, 1931, in an encounter with the police.

During the trial of S. Bhagat Singh, the second round up resulted in the case in which the author of this book was tried alongwith others. The third one led to the arrests in connection with the Delhi Conspiracy Case, whereby soldiers of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army like Dhanwantri, Vidya Bhushan Vatsayan, Kailashpati, Prof. Nandkishore, V. C. Vaishampayan, Gajanan Sadashiv Potdar, etc, were kept in confinement. The revolutionary activities, however, did not die out with the hunting out of the Hindustan Socialist Republic Army. Smt. Durga Devi, widow of the martyr, Bhagwati Charan, of our case, took part in the shooting down of a European sergeant at Lomington Road, Bombay, and an attempt was made on the life of the Governor of Punjab, a few months later, when Harikishan, Ranbir and Durga Datt were put on trial and Harikishan was sentenced to death and hanged.

Chandra Shekhar Azad, the G.O.C. of the Army of the revolutionaries was born in V. Bhawra of Zabua Tehsil in Central India. His father, Pandit Sita Ram Tewari and mother Smt. Jagadani Devi sent him to Banaras for higher studies in Sanskrit. He was attracted to the Civil Disobedience Movement of the Congress and took part in it, whilst only a lad of fourteen. He was arrested, but the police did not have handcuffs, small enough for his hands. While in jail he was given 12 lashes with a cane. The stripes dug deep into his flesh and produced such an indelible effect on his mind as to make him an inveterate enemy of the British. He turned into a terrorist revolutionary possessing such qualities of the head and heart as would have made him a successful military genius, any where. He could never tolerate immorality on the part of any of his comrades, and was like a pillar of strength and character to them all. He had no place in his heart for women or for love. His portrait of a possible partner in his life was that of a woman, carrying

a rifle on her shoulder and a huge stock of ammunition on her person, ever ready to go on loading the cartridges and passing them on to him in as swift a succession as the occasion demanded. And as for his life, he wanted his end to come only after a long and brave shooting affray with the enemy.

As luck would have it, his end came exactly in the manner he desired. On February 27, 1931, Vir Bhadra Tiwari spotted him in the Alfred Park, Allahabad and passed on the information to the police. It surrounded the park on all sides and blocked every possible entrance to it. Azad realised the gravity of the situation only after he was formally challenged by the police. He took up a vantage position and with revolvers in both hands began to fire right and left. Bisheshwar Singh, the Inspector of Police, was seriously injured and his force discharged a volley of bullets in return. The body of Azad was literally reduced to a riddle, but he continued fighting till the end ; and when he saw he had no strength left to fight any more, he fired the last shot at himself, and fell dead to the ground. It was the death he had always longed for all through his life, and for a revolutionary, no death could ever be more glorious than this.

Such in brief is the story of the great revolutionaries that lived in our country, suffered and died for it. They took to the path of a violent revolution, because it was impossible for them to believe in the efficacy of Ahimsa or non-violence, as means to the securing of deliverance from the foreign yoke. But I think the time came in 1942 when both violent and non-violent methods were employed to strike the last blow at the tottering British Imperialism in India and they shook it to its very foundations. They made it realise once for all that its days were numbered and that it must quit. Our countrymen fought the battle of our freedom in many different ways and made innumerable sacrifices, each according to his own creed. The story of the struggle for freedom on non-violent lines is no way a less exciting tale, and there is no dearth of fighters among

them. who laid down their lives in the same spirit of suffering and secrifice as was exhibited by their revolutionary compatriots.

In the wake of this inspiring story of the violent revolutionary movement, I feel very small in my venture to write about my life. But the story has been a continuous process, and it continued, even after my release in 1946, and went on till the country was free. As one of the small characters in this otherwise long story, I may be pardoned if I have unconsciously been overtaken by a temptation to establish any ties with that fiery brand of the architects of our freedom, whom I have always admired, loved and adored and who laid down their lives so that we may live with dignity and honour. Though departed, their memory is ever green and we shall be extremely unworthy of their heritage if instead of promoting the defence and development of our country, we frittered away our energies in useless pursuit, or in petty quarrels over caste, creed, language and region. Their sufferings and sacrifices will go waste if we cannot make this land of ours truly a land of their cherished dreams.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

I CAME to Lahore in 1922 from Barki, a suburb of Gujarkhan. (now in West Pakistan). The city fascinated me with its tall buildings, glittering shops, wide and seemingly interminable roads, and milling crowds of people all so bewilderingly novel for a simple lad from a small village. I was about nine, but looked older than my years. I would slip out of my house and run wild, eagerly pursuing whatever caught my imagination, I would wander round the city and sometime lose my way, thus causing many anxious moments of search and trouble to my mother and elder brother.

This, however, was hardly half the fascination, as Lahore bubbled with the political activities connected with the freedom movement Even we youngsters felt the impact. I saw groups of men shouting against the foreign yoke ; I saw piles of foreign cloth burning to ashes, and heard impassioned speakers exhorting the people to wear simple khadi. I knew that a fight against the white man was on, and learnt the songs of freedom sung by the people. The great bonfire and vehement speeches had a mysterious charm for me and the overwhelming feeling that some momentous upheaval was in the offing became an integral part of my consciousness.

I joined the Khalsa High School. Those were the days of the Akali movement, and the boys of the school were greatly agitated and, passionately indignant at the massacre of scores of people at Nankana Sahib. How we all yearned to wrest the murderous weapons of the enemy from his hands and turn them against him : Many boys, including myself, had volunteered for service in Akali Jathas, but our offer was rejected on grounds of our tender age.

I had heard many a legend about the Babar Akalis. Vaguely but unmistakably, their method of challenging the oppressors of our nation appealed to my emotions, and made me dream of valorous deeds and desperate adventures. The mass movements of the people filled me with wild enthusiasm, though I knew not how to give vent to it. An upsurge of lofty Patriotic emotions seethed within me, but could find no suitable outlet.

One day my mother told me as I returned from school : "It is good, my son, that you were not at home to see the heartrending scene that we witnessed."

Coming from my mother, this had great significance. I had seen her unruffled in the midst of danger : she was not easily flurried. Seeing her still visibly moved, I felt that something terrible had happened. She explained that a cart had passed by in front of our house, carrying the dead bodies of Babar Akalis who had been hanged. Among these was a young boy, a mere child.

The story had a strange appeal for me. How did he look like, lying dead ? Was he much bigger than I ? What was the cart made of ? Who drove the cart ? I asked many such questions, but my mother gave evasive replies. I could not discover the why and wherefore of the boy's hanging. One thing,however, was obvious. He had done something extraordinary and something extraordinary had happened to him. Here was a valorous deed, an act of great sacrifice, a protest made vocal in the most effective manner possible May be my reaction would have been different if I had seen him actually lying amidst the pile of dead bodies. As it was, this incident left me tingling for a similar deed, and this unknown boy became in my eyes a glorious hero.

Four or five boys of my age living in the neighbourhood had as enthusiastic an anti-white feeling as I had, and were in search of an opportunity to show their mettle. Burning with indignation against the foreign oppressor, we concealed ourselves one day behind the gates of the Islamia High School,

close to our house, and threw stones at the car of a European passing by. It gave us a peculiar sense of satisfaction and relief, though we had all missed the mark. The next time we concealed ourselves in the verandah of the Islamia School, and remained long on the lookout for a white man's car. Friday was our day of attack because the school remained closed and there was no one there to spy upon us. We usually ran away through the rear of the building without waiting to see the result of our onslaught. At times a stone or two hit the body of a car that went away without stopping. One day the window glass of a car was broken and its occupant, a wily European with forbidding features, stopped and caught sight of us running in wild haste towards the back of the school. He showed no inclination to run after us, but going straight to the shop of S. Dhian Singh and Sons, made a complaint to them that their boys had done the mischief. We could not understand how he came to know that we were tenants of S. Dhian Singh, but it was clear to us that we were caught. A severe rebuke was in store for us.

The desire to become a revolutionary was born and growing. It was synonymous with my childish aspirations to become a hero. I had learnt something of Sikh history at school while I was in the fifth class. One of the teachers, an impressive young man, often stirred us by reciting the episodes of Guru Gobind Singh's life. He would occasionally tell us about the recent happenings in the country. One day he incidentally mentioned the Kamagata Maru incident and the 1914-15 conspiracy. I naturally did not understand the real causes of the failure of the conspiracy: to me it seemed that we would have been free but for the treachery of a single person, Kirpal Singh. I had no doubt whatsoever that the 1914-15 conspirators could have driven the foreigners out of India. I had also been taught that the Sikh Raj was lost, not because of British valour in arms but through their treachery and deceit against their former ally, the minor Maharaja Dalip Singh.

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S. Bhagat Singh hanged in Lahore Central Jail on March 23. 1931.



Shri Raj Guru hanged in 1931 with S. Bhagat Singh and Shri Sukh Dev.



Sh. Sukh Dev was hanged with Shahid Bhagat Singh and Raj Guru in 1931.



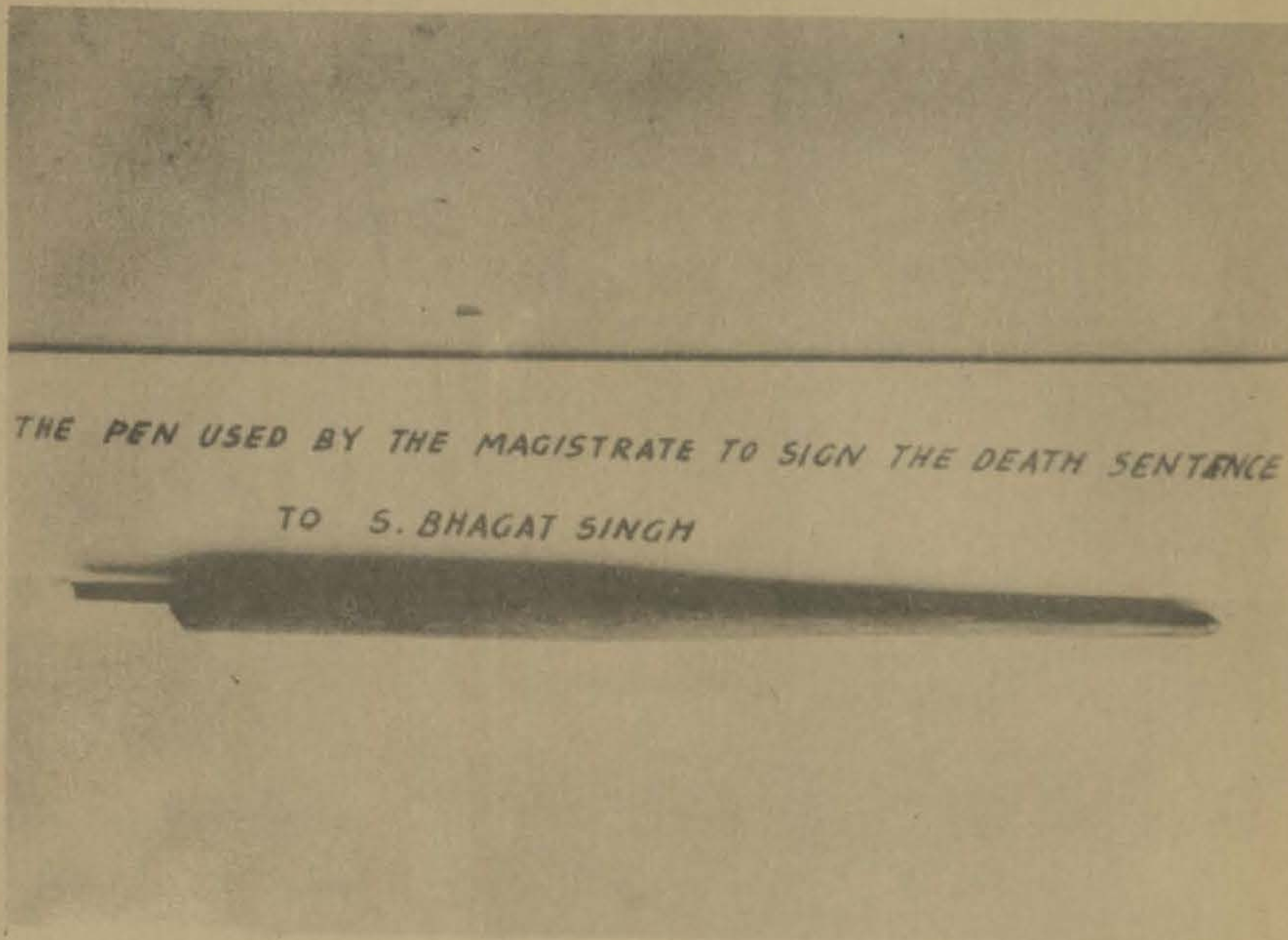
Shri Jatin Das

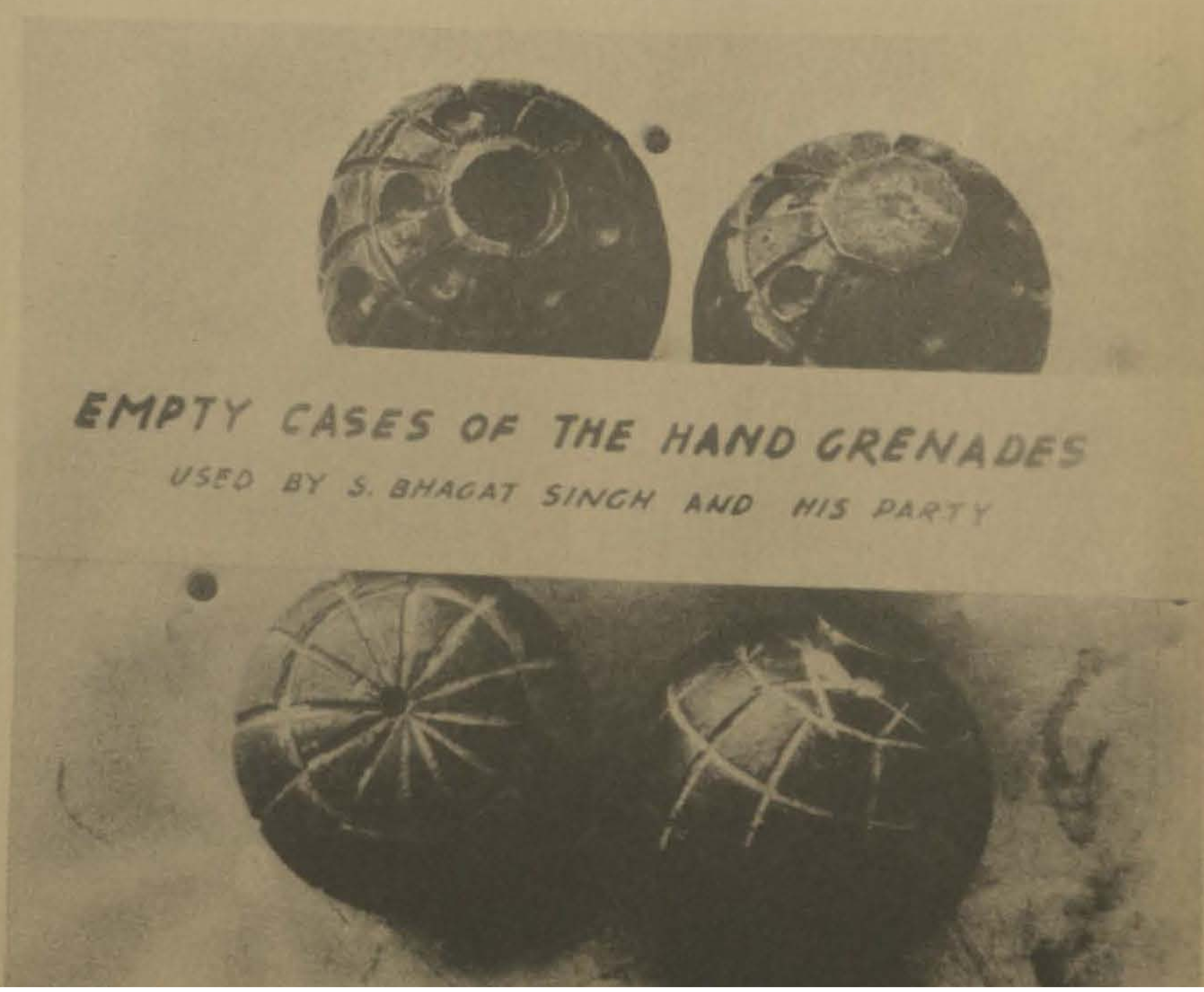


Shri Jatin Das died as a result of hunger strike of 62 days for reform in the conditions of political prisoners.

Shri Chander Shekhar Azad, the G.O.C. of the Revolutionary party.




THE PEN USED BY THE MAGISTRATE TO SIGN THE DEATH SENTENCE
TO S. BHAGAT SINGH

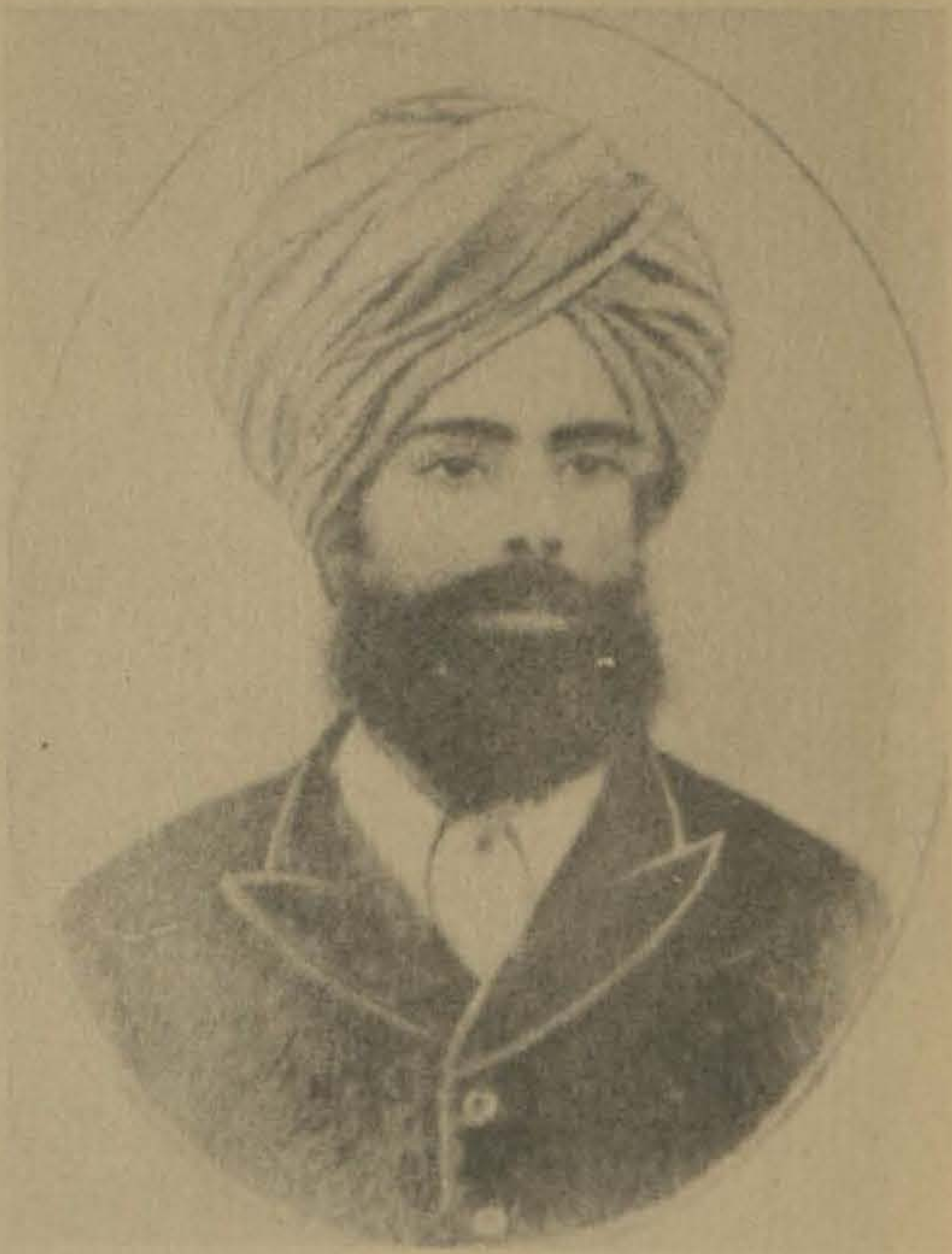

EMPTY CASES OF THE HAND GRENADES
USED BY S. BHAGAT SINGH AND HIS PARTY



Banke Dyal of "Pagri' Sambal Jatta" fame.



Shri Ras Bihari Bose the Leader of the Ghadar Party movemen in India.



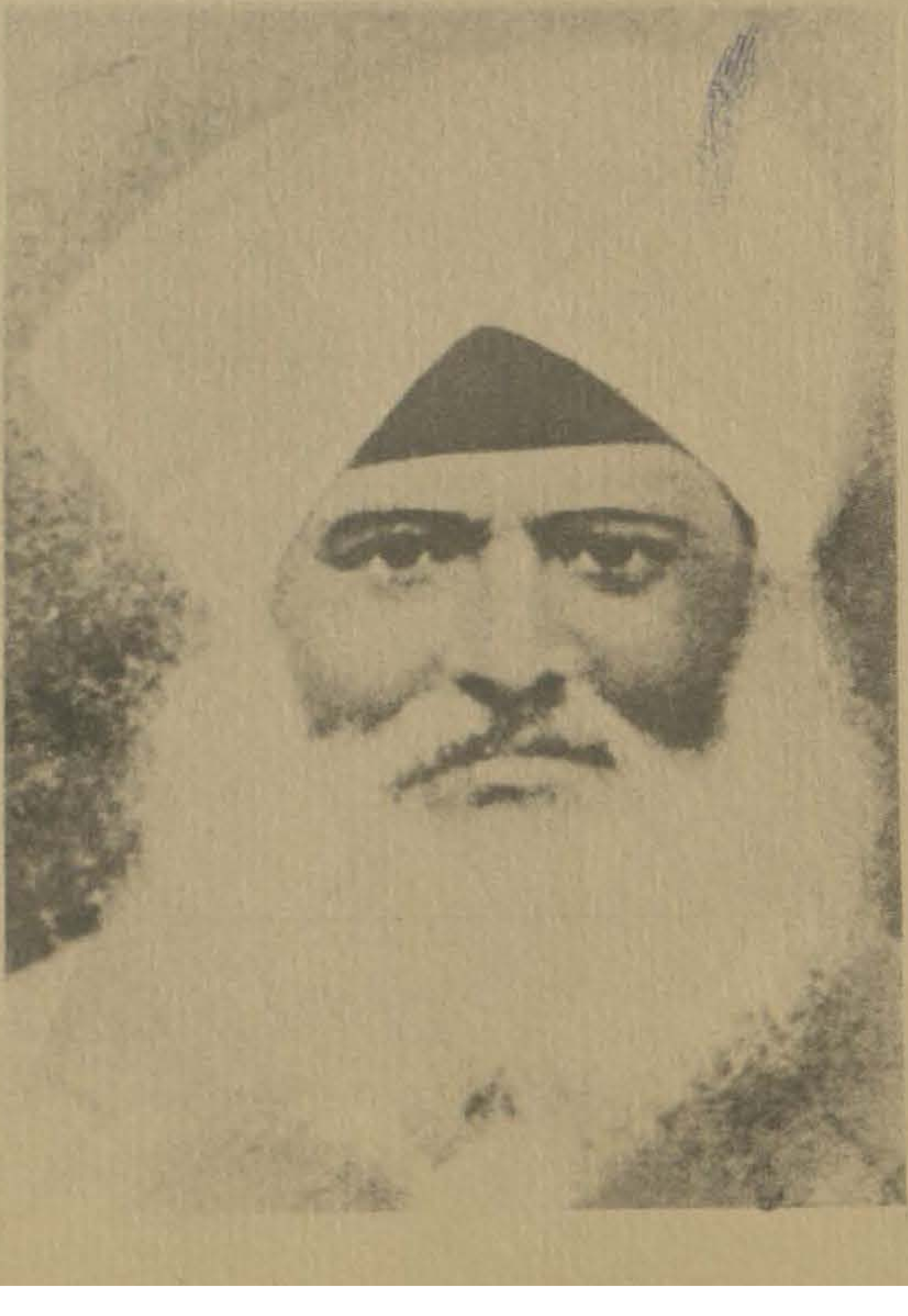
S. Ajit Singh well known Indian patriot uncle of S. Bhagat Singh died on 15th August 1947, the first day of Independence.



Baba Gurmukh Singh of 1914-15 Lahore Conspiracy Case.



Shri Bal Mukend; hanged in Hardinge Bomb Case.



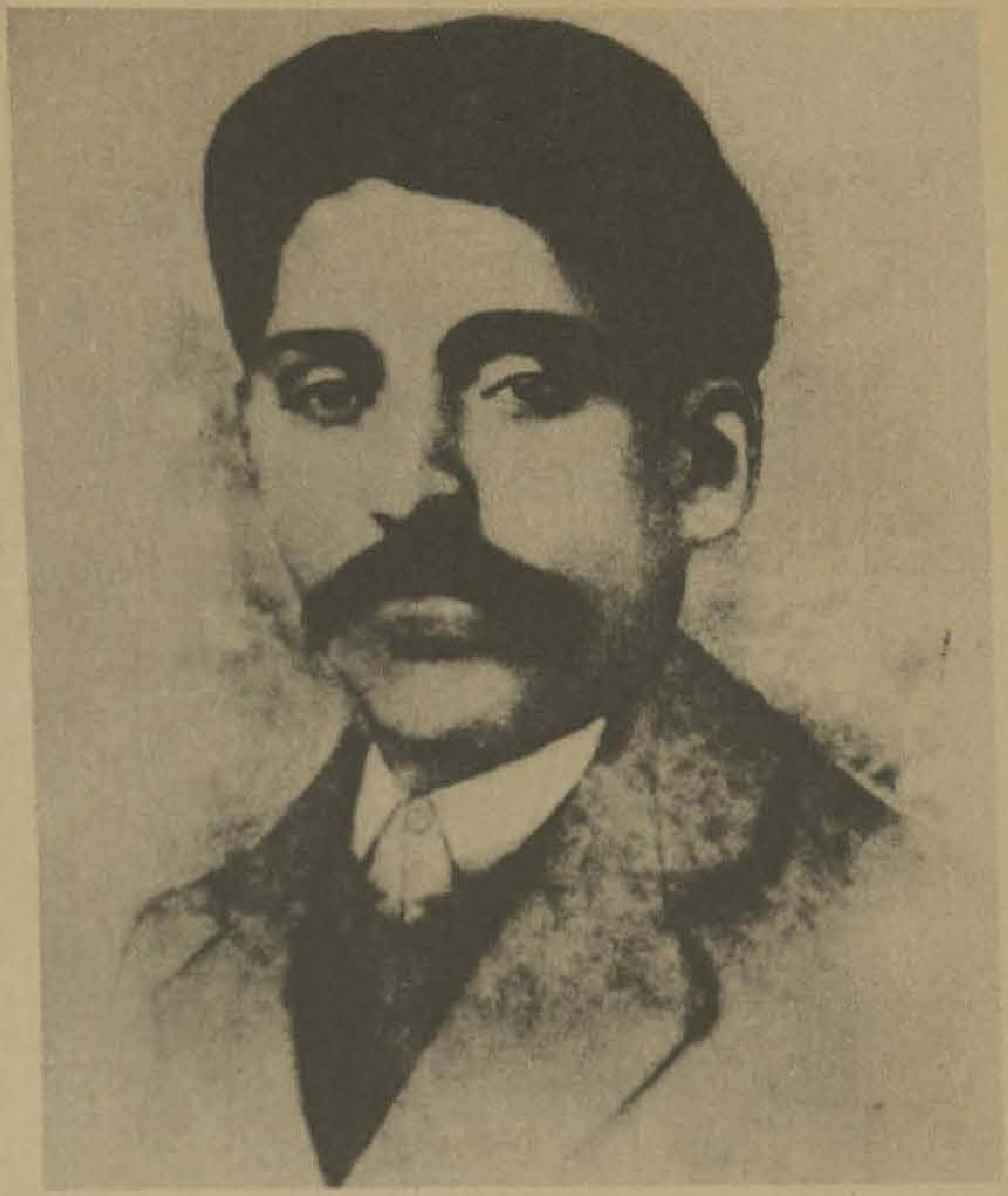
Baba Gurdit Singh of Kama Gatamaru Fame.



Sh. Vishnu Ganesh Pingle, of Ghadar Party; was hanged.



Sh. Kartar Singh Saraba youngest hero of Ghadar Party hanged.



Shri Kanshi Ram 1914-15 Conspiracy Case; was hanged.

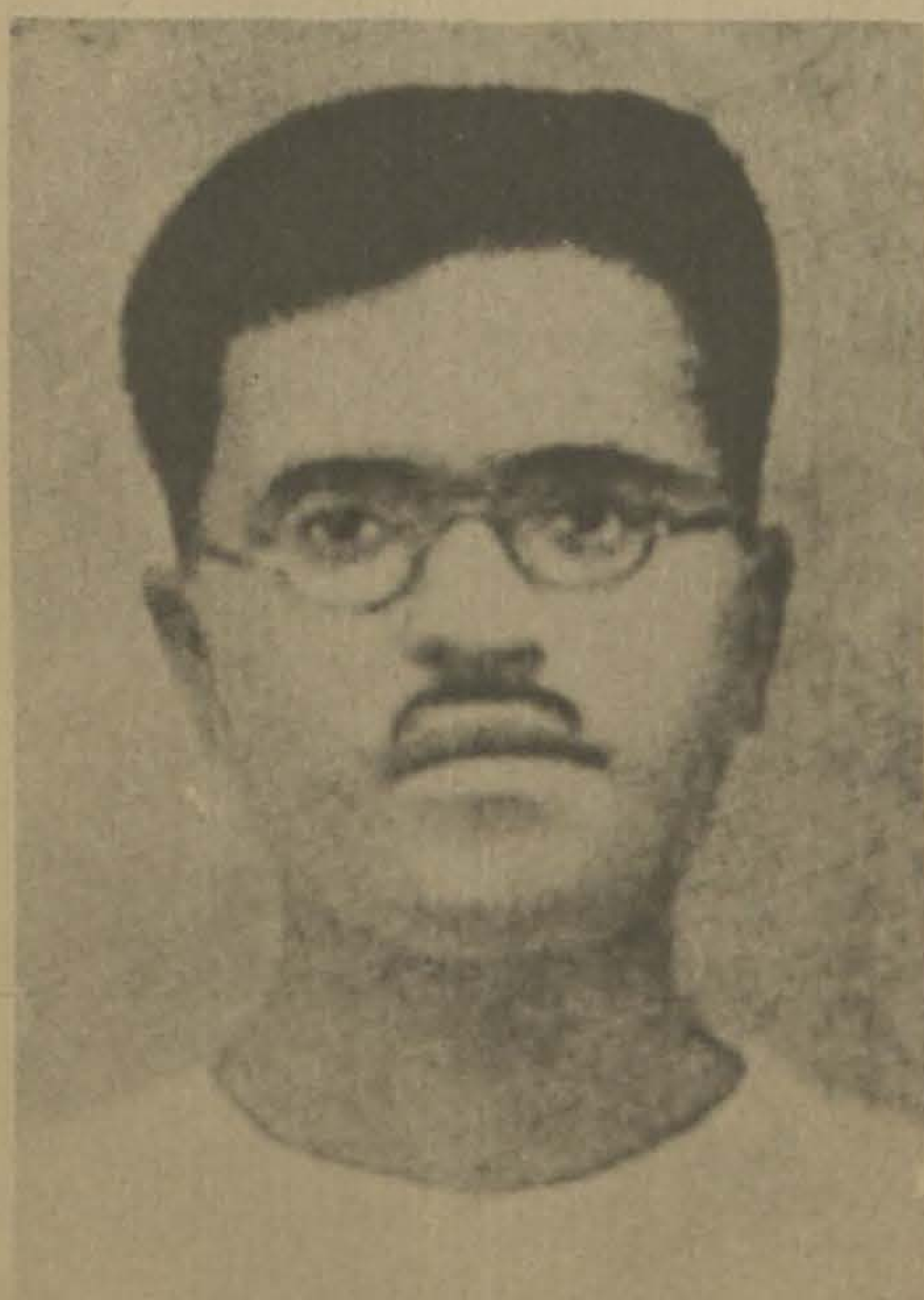


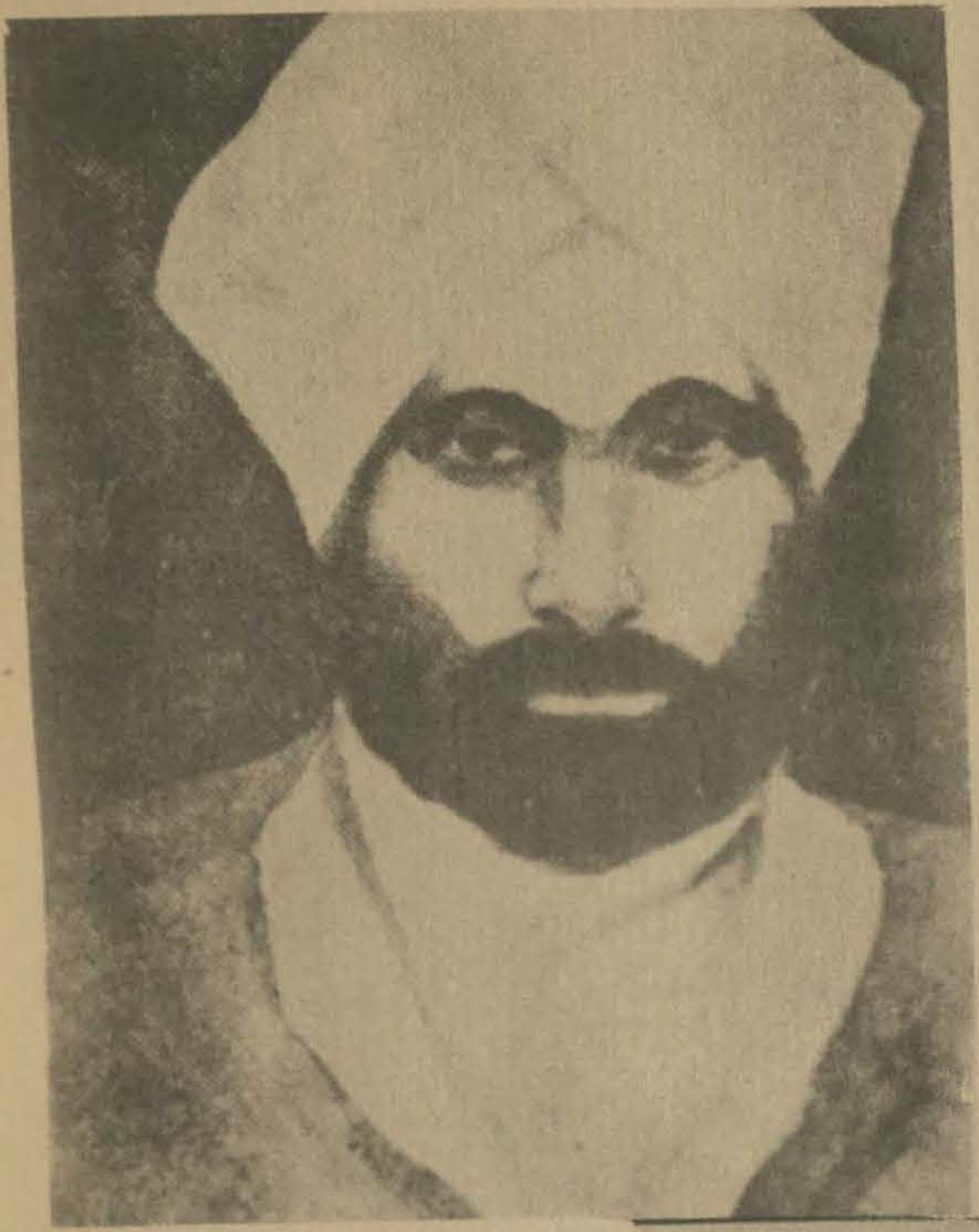
Shri Hardyal one of the pioneers of the revolution.



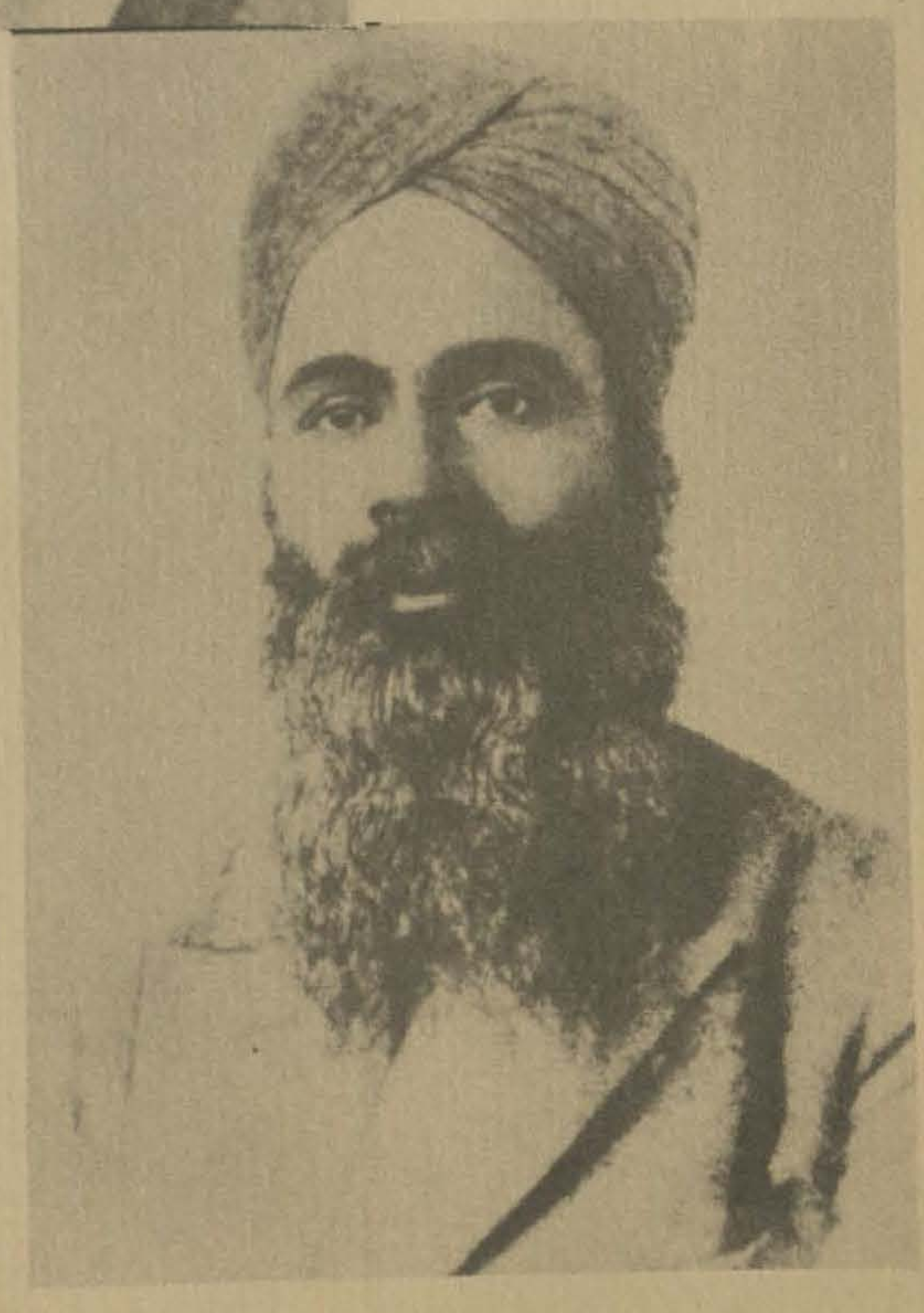
S. Uddam Singh who was hanged in London for shooting Sir Michae Odwyer of Jallianwala Bagh Fame.

Sh. Bhagwati Charan the brain of the H.S.R.A. who suffered martyrdom while testing bomb.





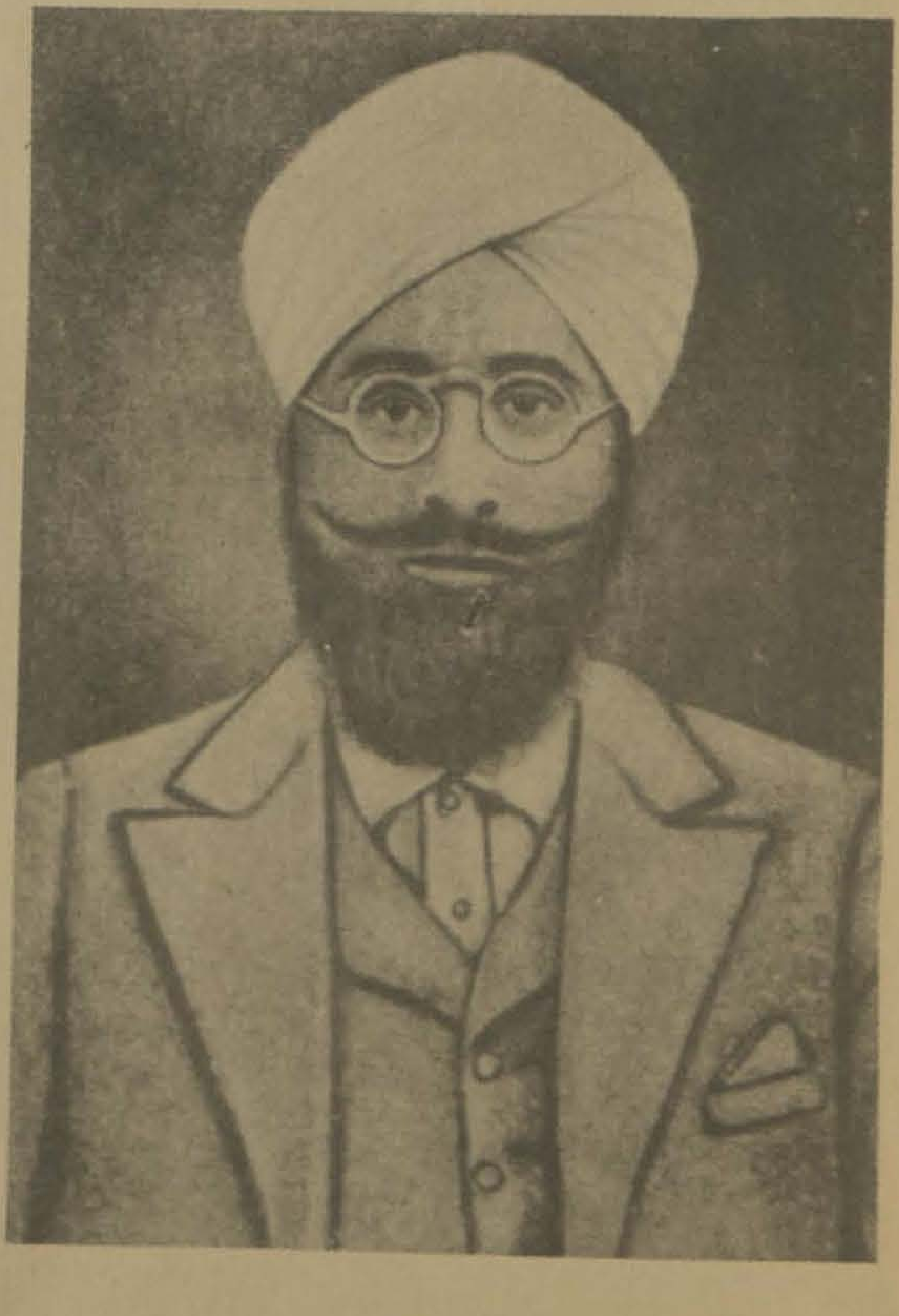
S. Kishan Singh Rargaj Babbar Akali Leader.



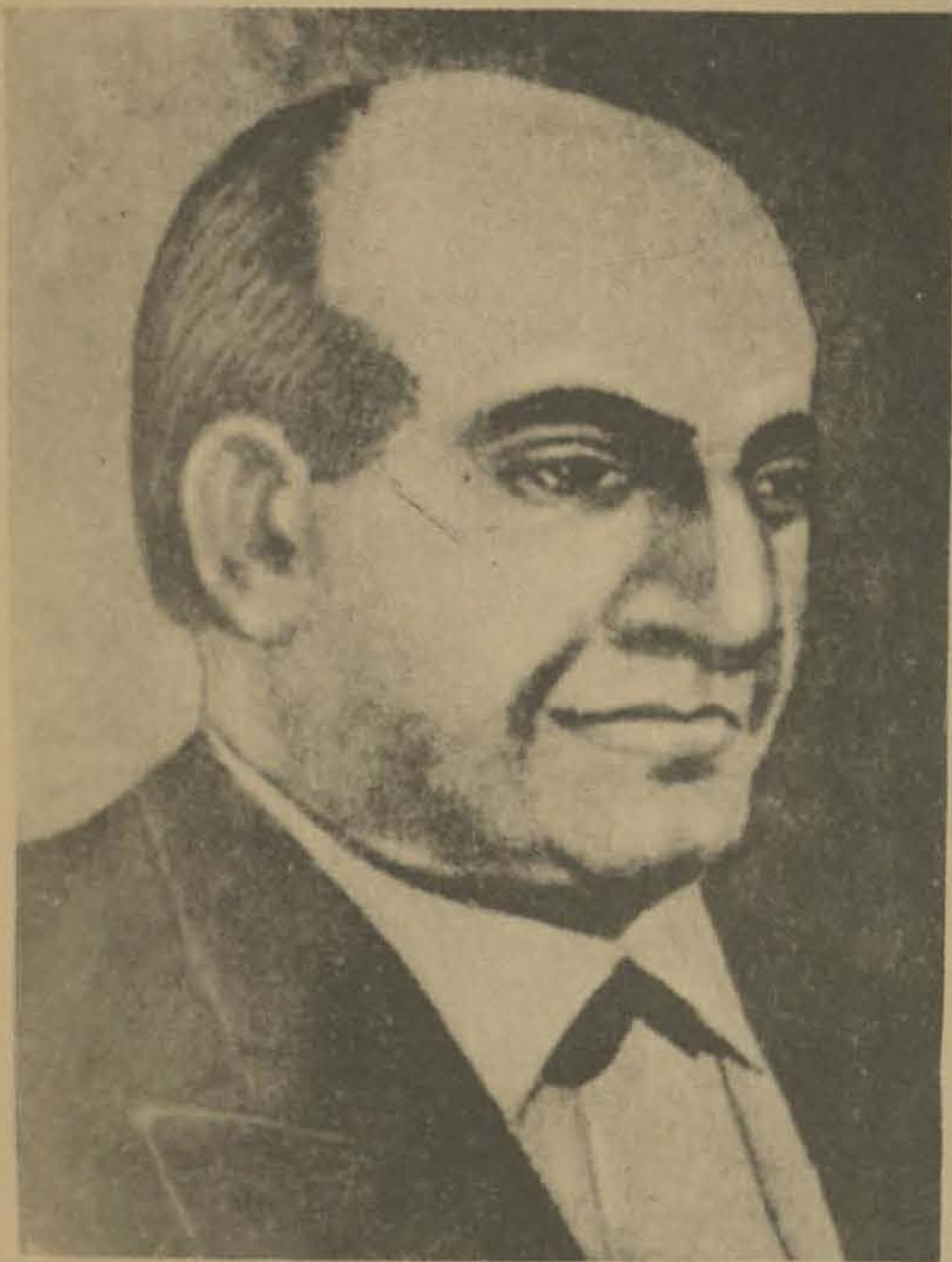
Shri Rattan Singh Babbar Akali Leader, escaped twice whilst being deported to and from Andamans died in encounter with police



Bhai Santokh Singh General Secretary of the Ghadar Party; was hanged.



Dr. Mathura Singh of 1914-15 Conspiracy Case; was hanged.



Master Amir Chand who was hanged in Hardinge Bomb Case.



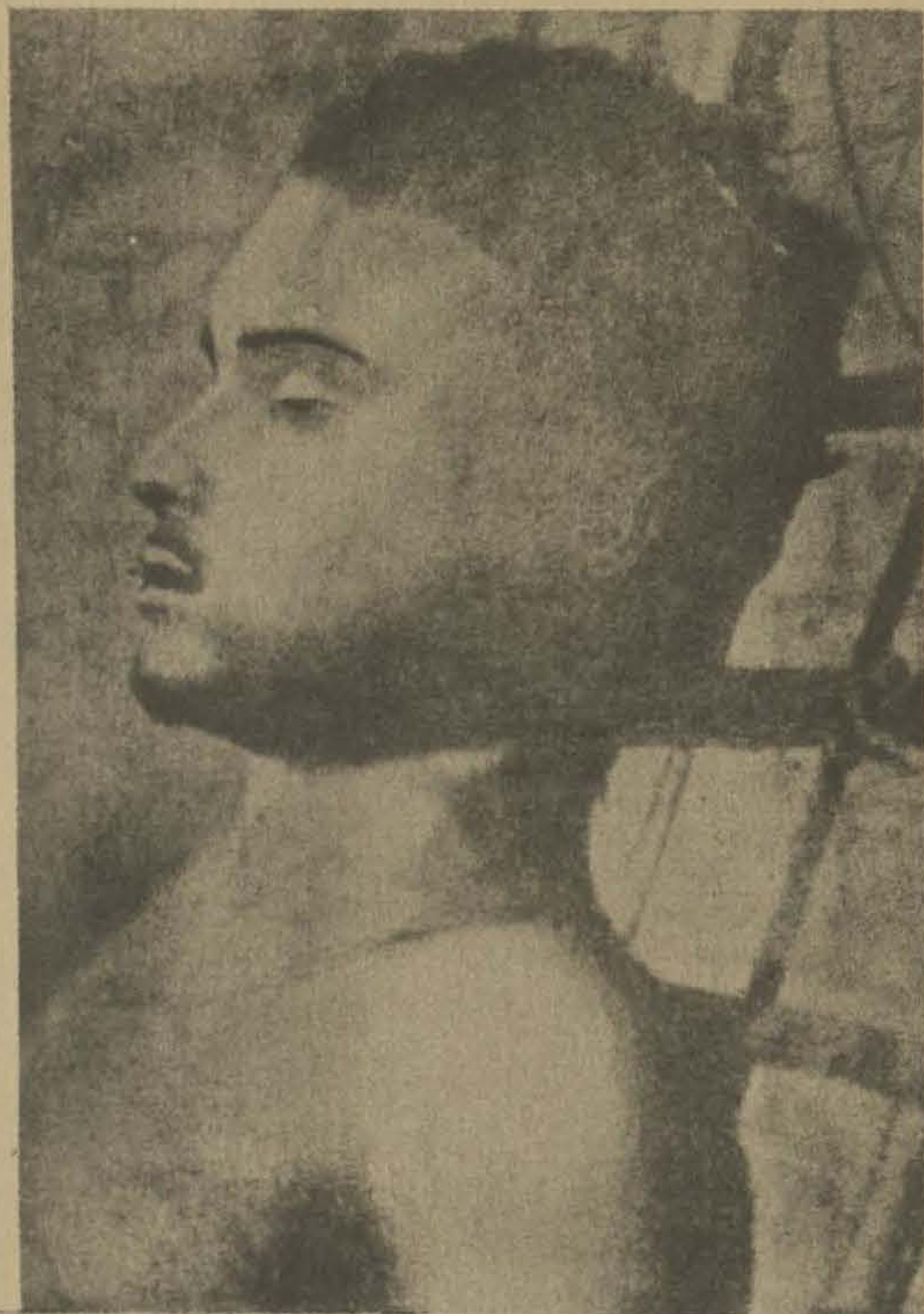
Shri Dhanwantri our most respected and loved comrade.



Sh. Ram Parshad Bismal of Kakori case who gave up his pen to take sword; hanged in 1926.



Rahmat Ullah one of the stalwarts of Ghadar Party who suffered martyrdom.



Shri Profulla Chandra Chaki the Bengal Revolutionary who shot himself dead rather than be hanged.

MADAN LAL DHINGRA

WHO DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY

AUGUST 17th 1909



"I AM PROUD TO HAVE THE HONOUR TO LAY DOWN MY HUMBLE LIFE FOR MY COUNTRY"

I admit that the other day I attempted to shed English blood as a humble revenge for the inhuman hangings and deportations of patriotic Indian youths.

In this attempt I have consulted none but my own conscience, I have conspired with none but my own duty.

I believe that a nation held down by foreign bayonets is in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible to a disarmed race I attacked by surprise, since guns were denied to me I drew forth my pistol and fired.

As a Hindoo I feel that wrong to my country is an insult to God. Her cause is the cause of Shri Ram, Her service is the service of Shri Krishna. Poor in wealth and intellect a son like myself has nothing else to offer to the Mother but his own blood and so I have sacrificed the same on Her altar.

The only lesson required in India at present is to learn how to die and the only way to teach it is by dying ourselves; therefore I die and glory in my Martyrdom.

This war will continue between India and England so long as Hindoo and English races last (if this present unnatural relation does not cease).

My only prayer to God is that I may be reborn of the same Mother and I may redie in the same sacred Cause till the Cause is successful and She stands free for the good of Humanity and to the glory of God.

MADAN LAL DHINGRA.



L. Lajpat Rai, Lion of the Punjab.

Public flogging at Lahore.



CHAPTER II

MORE OF THE WORLD

MY mother had an auspicious aspect about her, enhanced in effect by her confidence in herself and trust in others. She wielded the most beneficient influence over me as she did over all the members of our family and near relatives. Family quarrels, big and small, lost their bitterness at her touch. She had brought good luck to her parents when she was born. She married my father and his fortune began to improve, he flourished in his business and died a happy, prosperous man. His partner, however, paid us not a penny though our share must have been worth at least a lakh. My elder brother, Kartar Singh, was a minor then. Our father's death brought him back home from Rawalpindi where he had been attending school. He wanted to file a civil suit against our father's partner, and many respectable citizens of Gujarkhan offered to help him. Our mother, however, disliked the idea of going to law, and her views prevailed. She asked my brother to try his luck elsewhere and he came to Lahore. We left Gujarkhan permanently for Lahore when the business newly started by Kartar Singh began to prosper under the patient guidance of our mother. She had regained for us a respectable position in society. My elder married sisters and other near relatives were always vying with one another to have her with them for a month or two every year. She would sometimes yield to their persistent requests and be their guest for some days. She was fortunate in being loved and respected by all.

I was deeply attached to her. I was the youngest and had the largest share of her love. Her unexpected death, on the 21st of February, 1928, came as a great shock to us. I had seen her silently suffer from intense pain caused by a gallstone. She had a chain of tumours in her breast for the last few months. I used to sit by her side trying to fathom the depth of her sufferings, but she would smoothen her pain-racked features, talk to me, smile at me and caress me, and send me

away on some errand. There was one unsuccessful operation and then another, and then, we lost her forever.

My mother's death made the home a lonely place for me. Our business continued to flourish, reached its highest peak and then began to decline. I missed the tenderness she had given me so amply. My disposition was too sensitive to submit to the authority of my brothers shorn of the never failing sympathy and understanding of my mother. I had now an experience of the pinpricks and minor irritations of life in an average Indian home. My adolescent mind could little understand, much less appreciate, the fundamental soundness of an uninspiring and slightly disagreeable life. I was a creature of emotions, swayed by them so completely that I rose to heights of happiness, and fell into depths of despair on the slightest provocation. These quick changes of mood were a problem for both, my guardian's and for me. A nervous unrest impelled me to seek some change in my mode of living.

I began to take more interest, as I grew older, in the big Political events which were happening in the country. I would frequently go to our shop in the Anarkali Bazar and hear my elder brother and others discuss the day's news. Their comments made me turn the pages of the vernacular papers and read the news for myself. I became a regular reader and soon acquired an avid interest in the news about the activities of Indian revolutionaries. The Kakori Case and the death Sentences carried out in that connection greatly perturbed me.

I vividly recall the memories of the day when the newspaper vendor came shouting to our shop in his familiar voice,

"Assembly men Bomb Chal Gaya."

The news was splashed on the first page of the paper,

I hastily ran through it before my brother came from inside the shop and took the newspaper away. I was now about fifteen and dreamt of becoming an active revolutionary. The slogans raised by Congressmen and the bonfires of foreign cloth no more satisfied me as they had in the past. Those who had

thrown bombs in the Central Assembly had more courage and more audacity, and I was attracted by their creed. Why did not Bhagat Singh and Dutt, the bomb-throwers, run away in the confusion caused by the explosions? I wondered why they allowed themselves to be captured. And I thought, "Supposing I knew how to make Bombs."

I wanted to learn the technique of bomb-making, and set about obtaining the necessary information. But there was nobody to help me, nobody to give me the knowledge I needed. I felt lonely ; the idea of freedom was now an obsession with me, but there was no one who could share my thoughts.

CHAPTER III

THE UNSHEATHING OF THE SWORD

MY friend Jaswant Rai was a bit of Gandhite but by no means lacked interest in the activities of terrorists and revolutionaries. We often met, and the talks centred on current events. He seemed to be trying to hold a balance between two conflicting modes of thought: Gandhism and Terrorism. The knowledge that I was collecting information regarding the manufacture of bombs left him cold. One day, in an unusual fit of confidence, he divulged to me the secret of his having organised a revolutionary party.

This intrigued and electrified me. Eagerly and somewhat impatiently I listened while he slowly and cautiously told the story of a meeting held at the house of a revolutionary, Pandit Inderpal. He and some of his friends were present at the Pandit's house when the latter proposed a programme of terroristic activities and explained the urgency of carrying it out.

Jaswant Rai told me nothing beyond this, but he added that he was not totally against organised terrorist activity, though he could not himself take active part because of his circumstances. "My aged mother would die the day she hears of my arrest," he said.

"Why did you take part in the secret discussions, then?" I asked.

"One of the reasons is that I know how interested you would feel about the talks and their outcome,," he said.

I asked him to introduce me to Pandit Inderpal and he agreed to take me to him at 4 p.m. the next day.

I reached the Pandit's house at the appointed hour. It was a dilapidated building in Chowk Jhanda, the upper portion of which was cracked, The wall facing south had a dangerous inclination; so that it looked as though it may collapse any moment. A befitting abode of a courageous man. After some initial hesitation lasting a few seconds at the foot of the stairs I went up boldly. I made for the central room in the second storey. I found it almost empty with hardly a trace of any one living in it. I felt puzzled as I looked on all sides. There was a short narrow staircase leading into a very beautiful old fashioned balcony where, at the moment, three copy-writers were busy at their work. One of them was Inderpal, who invited me to come upstairs. He rose and embraced me heartily.

Jaswant Rai exclaimed pleasantly : "We were waiting for you ?"

The balcony rang with my footsteps. On closer examination it looked like the one I had seen in the Lahore Fort, just above the front of Diwan-i-Khas, said to have been the seat of Mughal kings.

The Pandit collected the papers scattered around him and put them away in a corner. He was a lean, upright young man, uncouth in appearance, but easy and polished in manners. As the conversation progressed, his eyes, the eyes of a visionary, began to shine, reflecting an unusual interest. I felt he had a

strong capacity to appreciate others, and had the tendency of discovering more in others than they had in them. There was, however, nothing insincere about him. His talk, his gestures, his undemonstrative way of bringing up serious things for discussion were positive proof of an integrated personality. He was a swarthy mountaineer from Kangra and had a hard core of reality beneath his simple talk that was in no way remarkable. He was not given to much argument. He understood my point and accepted or rejected it without any hesitation or wavering.

It was a comfortable place, this wooden balcony of the medieval ages, whose good old windows brought us a Pleasant draught from the great maidan of the market place below.

Jaswant Rai and the other companions of Pandit Inderpal soon left us alone. He said, "You will agree with me that Jaswant is a very good friend but not an ideal revolutionary. He is, for example, unable to oppose the will of his elder brother who forbids him to associate with us. He is under the influence of his relations. Of what use is his political consciousness when he does not feel free enough to take part in political activity ? I do not intend to prejudice you against him. Perhaps I have indulged in idle talk."

"You have exactly expressed what I feel about him." I said, and added after a pause, "but last night he told me he had become a member of a terrorist party."

The Pandit hastily replied: "No such party exists as yet. There was merely an idle talk. I think we should avoid such loose talk in future because neither Jaswant Rai nor his friends can suit us." He looked out of the window for a while and then said, "There is a friend of mine, an important member of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army. He comes to me for monetary help off and on. I have heard nothing about him for three or four months now. He is sure to come some day but I am afraid I won't be satisfied even if he offers to enlist

me as an active member of his party.. Why not try to start an independent organisation of our own ?"

"We should," I said, Breathless with excitement. The word "independent" had always a powerful charm for me.

"Jaswant Rai has told me that you have some formulae for making bombs? " I asked.

He nodded in assent. He informed me that he had some papers left by Yashpal, his revolutionary friend. He showed me two books on explosives, but they were concerned with blasting on a high scale and were of little use to us. We decided to make experiments in explosives used in small bombs. We agreed that there was no need for the present to enrol party members. About financing the scheme, he told me that he was earning more than a hundred rupees per month; and his companion, Pandit Rupchand, was also earning about as much. He hoped to have enough for carrying out experiments.

His habit of arriving at clear-cut, business-like decisions impressed me a lot. All was settled between us and I had now to begin trying various formulas at our disposal. I was happy to have met a friend like pandit Inderpal. He had the inteligence and energy for work and ambitious plans for the future.

Pandit Inderpal and Rupchand were too busy to help me in the experiments which I carried out in a small and separate room in the third storey of the house. I could give but a little time in the evenings as I was still a student at school and, moreover, had to satisfy my brothers with plausible reasons for my daily absence from home for a few hours.

About this time Yashpal, the organiser of the Punjab branch of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, began to visit Inderpal's house frequently. He had been declared an absconder in the first Lahore Conspiracy Case and needed monetary and other help.

Our activities increased, and I decided to leave my home. Pandit Inderpal was happy at the prospect of my doing whole-

time work. Experimental work was interesting and I began to devote more and more time to it.

One day the Pandit told me that Yashpal had asked him to leave Lahore on a special task for the main party, and that he had agreed. He was away for about two months. Pandit Rupchand shifted to another place in Gowal Mandi in order to reduce expenses. I had to suspend my experiments for lack of funds.

The date of the All-India Congress Session was approaching, and Lahore was full of Congress activity. The country was on the verge of non-violent storm which was to sweep away British imperialism. Mahatma Gandhi was in correspondence with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy.

On the 23rd of December a wave of sensation swept through the country at the news of an attempt to blow up the viceregal train. This was obviously an attempt to influence the Congress towards a struggle, and to scotch the efforts for a truce. The incident gave a fillip to the Radical elements participating in the Congress session.

Pandit Inderpal came back the day after the explosion. He told us the story of the important part he had played in the "action." The members of the main party who were in contact with him were satisfied with his work, but he was critical of theirs. He was still linked with them as he was not confident of being successful independently.

A few days later, Yashpal brought a packet of typed papers and asked Pandit Inderpal to have a copy of them prepared for him. The latter instructed me and Pandit Rupchand to make two copies, one of which was to be kept for ourselves. Here I found useful formulas for making bombs.

Yashpal was experiencing difficulties in collecting funds for the Party. A revolutionary has to disclose his identity and argue and explain the necessity and usefulness of the creed of violence before he is given any monetary help. This, however, is risky.

Yashpal disfavoured the idea of committing dacoities in order to raise funds. Such dacoities may involve murders, and these, according to him, antagonised the people and made it easy for the Government to send bright and promising young men to the gallows. He cited the example of the Kakori Case where an unsuccessful dacoity had cost so many precious lives. He explained these views at length to Pandit Inderpal and put before him the proposal for setting up a small mint of our own. The money coined there could well meet all expenses of the Party. He knew a man who could help with his experience in the matter, and offered to bring him to us. The man, however, was ill and subject to hysteric fits.

Yashpal left, and Pandit Inderpal told me of his views and his proposal and wanted to know my opinion. He for his own part was in favour of utilising the services of Yashpal's man, and regarded counterfeiting as better than committing dacoities for the purpose of raising funds. He wanted me to take charge of the proposed work ; and give it a practical shape. I consented.

Meanwhile, some Islamia College students had stolen scientific equipment from their college laboratory. A magic lantern show was being held in the College hall when the students, according to their prearranged plan, took advantage of the noise in the hall and the darkness outside, broke through the windows of the laboratory and whisked away scientific instruments, acids *and other 'materials'*. They inscribed with chalk the following words in bold letters on the blackboard: "We are taking scientific material in the interests of the country."

These boys, of course, wanted to manufacture bombs. The theft was ill-planned. They lifted too much unnecessary material. They had to distribute the stolen goods among themselves and disperse as soon as they could. They learnt later that the most necessary article, picric acid, for which the theft had been mainly planned was lost somewhere in the confusion that ensued after the theft.

They resolved to prepare the acid themselves. A safe place for experiments was required, and they chose a room in the

residence of one of their comrades, the nephew of a responsible C. I. D. Officer. They would work while he was away at his office. One day the room was filled with odorous fumes when the officer was about to return. They had all the day carried on research work, but the wrong mixing of acids had brought them no nearer success. They concealed the equipment and cleared out by the time the officer arrived. But he could easily guess what had happened, because he knew about the recent theft in the Islamia College. The students committed other mistakes, and thus, the full story of their activities became known to the C. I. D. in a few days.

Arrests and searches were now feared and the students found themselves in tight corner, not knowing where to dispose of the stolen material. One of them, whom I shall call Mr. A., was a friend of mine. He had once hinted to me about his efforts to organise a revolutionary group among the students. I met him one day after the Islamia College theft, and he disclosed to me that he was one of the organisers of the group that had begun "work." He was an M. A. student of the same college.

He sought my help in connection with the disposal of the stolen scientific equipment. I was only too willing to take charge of the material but the difficulty was how to keep secret from him the place where I was to take it, for I knew full well that he and several other students were being followed by the police and were going to be arrested any moment. I, therefore, told him to collect all the material and send it in a tonga to a certain untenanted open house outside Taxali Gate. His man, Mr. B., came to the appointed place in a tonga laden with three trunks fully packed with equipment. I deposited the trunks in the open courtyard of the above-mentioned house, and waited for Mr. B., to go. He himself was in fact in nervous haste to return. I called in another tonga a few minutes after his departure and carried the trunks to the house of our Party headquarter. Later I learnt that the Police had, in the course of their enquiries, gone to the vacant house

outside Taxali Gate, but could obtain no information about a certain Sikh, whom they wanted to trace.

Several Mohammedan students and a Hindu were arrested by the Police, but strangely enough Mr. A was left alone. He explained to me that he had not taken any important part in the theft case and that his not being arrested was largely due to his being a near relative of a Deputy Superintendent of the C. I. D.

Pandit Inderpal expressed the opinion that there was the risk of my being declared an absconder in the Islamia College theft case. I had now all the material required for experimenting in explosives, but Pandit Inderpal advised me to postpone that kind of work and to give all my attention to coin-making. Bhag Ram, Yashpal's man, had come from Jammu and was staying with us.

Bhag Ram was a well-built man of about forty, to all appearance a peaceful soul with suave manners and a mild way of dealing with people, his gentle nature frequently bubbling into interesting, genial talk. We boarded a train for Jammu on the day of the Basant festival of 1930. All articles used in the making of coins had been brought from Lahore, for Bhag Ram had told me that even ordinary ones would not be available at Jammu. His relatives lived in Jammu, but he could not go to stay with them, and took me to the house of a friend, a private tutor.

I soon discovered that Bhag Ram had no practical knowledge of minting coins though he could minutely explain its theory without omitting a single detail. I did not know even the A. B. C. of the job. I had to tackle the practical job myself. There were difficulties at every step. Bhag Ram brought me some books on the subject of melting of metals and I studied them closely. After strenuous efforts lasting about three long months, a rupee coin, accurate in size and perfect in sounding, was prepared. We had succeeded in finding out the alloy and had mastered the art of making moulds, but we failed to make coins on a large scale in an easy and paying way. We required a good deal of practice.

Bhag Ram had, during this period, gone to Lahore three or four times in order to bring certain articles we required. The day he arrived in Jammu after his last visit to Lahore, someone distributed leaflets of an objectionable nature in the city. An officer on duty at the only bridge that links the city with the Railway station had seen him come from outside. He was, moreover, known to be an idler. So the police strongly suspected him of distributing leaflets.

Jammu is not a very large city, but it had then a big Police and C. I. D. force with little work to do. They began to patrol the bazaar in which our house was situated. They sat down in plain clothes in front of the house and followed every person who came in or went out. This made us panicky. We had indeed nothing to do with the distribution of leaflets but it was much better to be arrested on that account than for minting counterfeit coins. Rightly observed Bhag Ram, "Jammu is a princely State. The Police will throw us into a dungeon, and no body will know anything about us for ages." Our host, a none-too-inquisitive gentleman, who remained out of the house as long as he could in the day, was not a member of the Party, though he knew we were revolutionaries, and, because of his friendship with Bhag Ram, was indirectly helping us. We did not want him to be put to trouble on our account. Many such considerations weighed with us and we decided to destroy all the coin-making material-the furnance, the moulds and even the pieces of silver in our possession.

The police had not made up their mind to come in when we went out under cover of darkness and caught the train for Lahore. We resolved to give up the idea of coin-making once and for all.

During my absence from Lahore the students accused in the Picric Acid Robbery case, as it came to be known, were brought to trial. The case, however, had to be withdrawn because the police had failed to recover a single stolen article. The accused belonged to influential families, the majority of them being relatives of officers in responsible positions in Government service, and no false evidence could possibly be used against them. The police let them off with a warning.

Back in Lahore, I went to see my Mohammedan friend Mr. A. He told me that he too had been arrested later, but that the good offices of his high-ranking relative had procured his release after a few days. He talked disparagingly of his fellow accused, and told me how shabbily every one of them had behaved when confronted with the police. As I took leave of him, I got the impression that he was thoroughly scared.

A few minutes later I happened to meet Mr. B., the student who had brought me the stolen equipment in a tonga. He told altogether a different story. Taking me aside, he accused Mr. A, of being in the employ of the C. I. D. He vehemently criticised his conduct, alleging that he had first incited the students to commit illegal acts and had subsequently given full information to the officials.

I had always had my doubts about Mr. A. Now I had begun to observe his habits more carefully. The fellow, however, proved to be very elusive. We met often enough, and I expected him to try to worm himself into my confidence. But he always talked of trivialities. He never tried to elicit any information regarding my underground activities though without doubt he knew that I was a revolutionary. Perhaps he was too timid to make any such attempt.

Once, when we were strolling in the Circular Garden, he unexpectedly pressed my shoulder and asked, "What will you do, if perchance you came to suspect me?" He seemed nervous and frightened. I told him, gently, that in that case I should warn my friends.

More agitated, he inquired, "What will they do then?"

"I can't say for certain," I replied.

"At the most what can they do?" he asked in bewilderment.

"Maybe they will pass a death sentence."

Was he a potential traitor or just timid?

My retort, though gently delivered, silenced him. There was a hard look about his eyes. Perhaps he had not expected such a stunning answer though he had asked the question solemnly enough.

We did not meet for several days. Our brief but ominous conversation had come between us though it need not have at all, for, how could he betray us, when he knew nothing about our activities? Perhaps he did not know even my residence. Why, then, had he made so much of a remark which was only a theoretical answer to a question he had asked? He knew well enough I was a revolutionary, for I had accepted the stolen material from him.

We met again by chance in the Circular Garden. He was cordial as usual, but I could clearly read the same look of suspicion in his countenance as I had noted last time. He said he was too frightened to meet me very often and added, almost in a whisper, "You are a revolutionary, a desperate fellow. The like of you think nothing of friendship. You seem to be sincere and affectionate, and this, coupled with our erstwhile friendship, draws me to you, but fear holds me back. Can't you promise that you will at once tell me whenever you become suspicious of me ?"

He held himself back a little as he uttered these words, expecting, as it were, an unwelcome answer. I replied that I was not that sort of revolutionary who cannot understand the need for friendship and loyalty in human relationship. "Your fears are due to the rumours your college friends have been spreading against you, but you ought not to mind. Why should you be afraid of anybody when you mean no harm to him?".

We met quite often after this. He would at times try to dissuade me from taking part in secret work. He never could reconcile himself to my philosophy of life. He could not regard life as an adventure, nor could he ever understand the need for a relentless war against injustice. One would have thought he could never brook my being a patriot.

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CHAPTER IV

"THE WHEEL OF FIRE"

THERE were too many of us residing in the single-roomed house rented by Pandit Rupchand during Pandit Inderpal's absence from Lahore. The room was situated above a betel-seller's shop in Subzi Mandi Chauk of Gowal Mandi and the roofs of four or five adjoining shops served as our courtyard. Pandit Inderpal's two younger brothers and Rupchand's brother attended school, and there were two more young boys from Kangra allowed free board and lodging by Pandit Inderpal, who taught them the art of copy-writing in order to enable them to make a living. My elder brother Amrik Singh often came to stay with us. A member or two of the main party also would now and then find shelter in the same place for a few days. We slept outside on the spacious roof upon outworn mattresses, except on rainy days against which there could be no adequate provision.

Pandit Rupchand was the sole earning member at the time, because Pandit Inderpal could not work regularly on account of Party work. The failure of our coin-making enterprise had added not a little to our financial difficulties. Crowning all these anxieties was the thought of Pandit Inderpal's day of marriage drawing nearer : there was no going back on the pledged word in the Kangra district.

The Pandit would have desired anything but marriage at this stage of uncertainty about his future. He invented various reasons to secure a postponement but nobody would listen to him-not even his sister living at Lahore.

The police were investigating the Viceregal Train Case and he felt he was not altogether safe. "Anyway," he said, "postponement is the best course. If I am not arrested within the next six months, I shall marry. The girl's father and the members of my family will have to reconsider their views about the promise of marriage if I am arrested in the meanwhile and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. I should tell them what a risk they are running by insisting on holding the marriage on the appointed date."

None of the Party members objected to this forced disclosure of a Party secret if it could help him in any way, but on second thoughts he changed his mind. He was afraid he would create a fuss for nothing: his conservative kinsfolk would never go back on the pledged word. The last excuse he could urge was lack of funds, but his sister made good the money.

So the marriage took place on the appointed day. Several party members including myself took part in the celebration, but there was nothing revolutionary about us except our jokes, only half-appreciated by the uninitiated.

Our activities were on the increase. Hans Raj, popularly nicknamed "Wireless"–a wiry young man hailing from Lyallpur-had become acquainted with Pandit Inderpal during his stay in Delhi, and had lately become attached to our group. Bhag Ram visited us after short intervals and took part in our deliberations to hammer out a programme of action.

I would close the door of the stairs, and thus improvise a miniature laboratory wherein I could carry on experiments till the school-going children came back. It was interesting work, and an absorbing hobby. I had never been taught Chemistry. I had to learn everything right from the start, and all by my own efforts. My labours at last bore fruit and the explosive was ready. I tested it in a very small quantity in the "laboratory" and compared it with the specimen Yashpal had left with us.

Now it remained to test the strength of the explosive in a bomb filled with it. A crude bomb was prepared for this purpose and four of us, Pandit Inderpal, Bhag Ram, Hans Raj and I went out of the city to the river bank, to carry out a test. We left our bicycles under a tree and going a few hundred yards farther ignited the bomb. It exploded with a terrific noise, frightening the cattle in the fields and the birds on the trees! We found no bomb-splinters. So the explosive was a success. The success was all the greater, for it enabled us to work independently of the main Party. In all-pervading lack of technical knowledge and skill, the bomb was the nucleus of terrorist organisations.

The Satyagraha movement launched by the Congress was in full swing, and so was the repression by the police. Knowing full well thatCongressmen were incapable of retaliation because of their self-imposed restraint, the police started an unchallenged regime of terror, aimed at demoralising the masses. There was universal resentment against the excesses of the police, and mounting wrath of our people turned from the real enemy to his tools—to those servicemen who overstepped the boundaries of established law in their frantic but vain attempts to stem the rising tide of freedom. Even the children in the streets hurled abusive epithets in the face of these custodians of law. The fear of lathi charges, arrests and shootings no longer affected the patriots, but they could not meet violence with violence. We felt it our duty to impress upon the police what was in store for them if they went on unchecked in their barbarous policy towards the people.

How best could we match the terror of the police with a terror of our own? If only we could accomplish something of the sort in spite of our limited resources, we were sure to gain immense sympathy from the public.

Hans Raj "Wireless" put forth his suggestion for making decoy-bombs and explained how they could be used against the police. Bhag Ram asked during the discussion that ensued whether he intended murders on a large scale.

"There is the chance of some policemen getting killed," replied Hans Raj.

Bhag Ram sounded a note of warning: "Our Party has not fully begun functioning as yet, and we would be wiped out in a few days, with none left behind to carry on revolutionary work if we commit murders at the outset. I am totally opposed to any killings unless we are forced to resort to them."

He was a comrade of wide experience and his words always carried weight with us. Discussion continued for some days. A new and more complicated problem faced us: how to make the bombs which would serve the purpose of "adequate punishment" and yet not kill ?

It was decided to use tin-covers in place of iron-shells in bombs. A specimen was prepared and tested in an open field outside the city. We were satisfied at the moderate results obtained. A few days more, and we had perfected our scheme for simultaneous bomb-explosions at various places in the province. The action, our leaflets stated, was to be only the first of a series which the Atshi-chakkar Party (our anti-police branch of the main organisation) meant to carry out if the police did not change their barbarous method of dealing witn non-violent Satyagrahis and their sympathisers.

Simultaneous explosions occurred on the morning of the 19th of June, 1930, at Lahore, Amritsar, Lyallpur, Gujranwala, Sheikhupura and Rawalpindi. A police Havildar was fatally wounded at Gujranwala. Two police officers received injuries at Lyallpur. One of them was wounded in the ear and was sent to the Mayo Hospital at Lahore for treatment. He was discharged as cured from the hospital but the trouble in his ear revived later, his wound became septic and he died of this.

We were sad at these deaths which we had never intended. We had in our deliberations overlooked the fact that there was always the chance of death, for a man could even die of shell-shock. The action had, however, produced the desired effect, which was evidenced in the cautious attitude of the police. The talk of the man-in-the-street indicated that the bomb explosions were taken as an opportune step by a large section of the populace.

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CHAPTER V

THE PLANNED VERSUS UNPLANNED

PANDIT INDERPAL rented another house in Krishan Nagar which belonged to our neighbour, Dhan Devi, a Congress worker. The Gowal Mandi house was too congested and hardly suitable for the headquarters of a secret organisation. Yashpal had intimated to us his decision to settle in Lahore for several months in pursuance of a plan to rescue Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades, who were being tried in the Central Jail. He began to live in the new house. The 19th June Action secured an important place for us in the hearts of the main-party men.

Comrades Bhagwati Charan, Chandrashekhar Azad., Lekh Ram alias Jat, and many other members of the main party visited the Krishan Nagar house from time to time as the preparations for the rescue action were afoot. Bhag Ram, Hans Raj, Inderpal and other members of our group met them there. Another house was rented by the party at Bahawalpur Road where a powerful bomb of a type much more dangerous than used by us was being prepared. The rescue action was to prove a big affair in which a larger force than hitherto employed by the Party was to take part.

The plan received a serious blow from the tragic death of Comrade Bhagwati Charan in the jungle near Ravi, where he had gone with other comrades to test a newly prepared bomb. The bomb had exploded in his hand.

A few days later the Bahawalpur Road house shook with explosions that had been caused by the sudden bursting of several bombs in an almirah, without any apparent cause. By a happy chance all the Party members present were in the compound. They had to quit the place in a hurry and disperse to various places where they were to remain in hiding till they could safely meet again. The attempt to save Sardar Bhagat Singh and other comrades had to be deferred.

Meanwhile the Gowal Mandi house continued to be the centre of our activities. The two young men from Kangra

had obtained employment through the efforts of Pandit Inderpal. In the interests of economy it was decided to give up the house. Pandit Rupchand shifted to the Krishan Nagar house with the rest. Jahangiri Lal (a co-opted member of our group) and his two brothers also came to live there. The eldest of them, Kundan Lal brought his wife and son. Pandit Inderpal's wife was already there. The house was spacious. The big family of revolutionaries living here included several persons who were not members of the Party ; some were not even sympathisers. Even so, there was accommodation to spare, so that we sublet a portion of the upper storey to a married couple. The Party members had no immediate plans before them though several new young men had joined us. We were very cautious. We held our meetings often under the pretence of playing cards.

Hans Raj and I carried on experiments in a room set apart for the purpose. Prem Nath, a college student belonging to Lahore, who had joined the Party, assisted us in this work. But we had to postpone our efforts before they could yield results.

Mr. A. met me one day by chance, and straightaway inquired. "Where do you live?"

It was an awkward question, and totally unexpected. My surprise was evident. Without waiting for my reply he added that he had asked the question because he had something very important to tell me. As we walked he told me that for my sake he was going to reveal, a secret at a great risk to himself. Always cautious in his presence, I wondered what was in his mind, and let him lead me to a safe place where nobody could overhear us. Then he said, "Look here, you are living in Krishan Nagar, in your party house, a few hundred paces from the U. T. C. grounds....and...."

Did he know anything more ? I wondered. He went on after a brief pause, "A purbia (i.e. a man from U. P.) is living next door to you. He is a C.I.D. man, purposely sent there to watch you. A large number of men are working under his

orders. They follow you wherever you go, and keep constant watch on your house. You may have noticed a building just in front of the U.T.C. grounds ; that is the rear of the C.I.D. office. The C.I.D. men watch you daily from behind the curtains and know all the men who frequent your house. Beware of your neighbour, who wears a dhoti and a short jacket. His wife and son, six or seven years old, also keep peeping into your house to obtain information".

Mr. A. was breathless with excitement. He was really serious. There was little doubt that he had a sincere desire to help me. He was confident of the truth of the information he had brought, and waited to see my reaction. Then he continued, "I went to my relative's house yesterday and obtained this detailed information from his son. I shall do all that I can for you but can't you desist from treading this path to ruin ? You are so wilful. No reasoning on my part seems to affect you. Who knows what fate awaits you, but this much is certain : We will have to part perhaps for ever. Never again shall we be able to talk like friends. Why do you take this life-and-death matter so lightly ? Will nothing ever deter you ?" Thus he went on pleading, expostulating, and exhorting, with tears in his eyes.

What could I say ? I was touched by his concern for me, but how could I abandon my path of duty, and give up my heart's desire ? We seemed to exist on different planes altogether. He had no conception of anything nobler ; for him, the height of wisdom seemed to be to save one's skin. I tried to reassure him as best as I could that there was no reason to be so pessimistic. I told him he was exaggerating the dangers because of his attachment towards me. I could make it plain, firmly and beyond doubt, but as gently as possible, ,that I could not change my course, come what may.

"Well, good-bye", he said at last, disconsolately.

"Good-bye", I replied.

Two days before this meeting with Mr. A., Lala Kundan Lal, the elder brother of Jahangiri Lal, had caught hold of a boy of not more than seven years, peeping into our house through the cracks of the door. The lad turned pale with fright at being surprised. The wife of our neighbour had also aroused suspicions because of her over-inquisitiveness about the occupation of the male members of our house, and the wives of Pandit Inderpal and Lala Kundal Lal had even been asked by her if they had ever seen a bomb. Pandit Inderpal had an interview with the neighbour, which was by no means pleasant to the latter. The information brought by Mr. A. confirmed us in our suspicions. We started taking necessary measures of precaution against a surprise raid by the police.

We removed all the possibly suspicious objects from our house, including the bulky trunks containing scientific equipment. Our laboratory here was a large one compared to that of Gowal Mandi *Baithak*. It was no easy matter to remove all these things in view of the day-and-night watch kept over us, but we succeeded somehow, by the device of a counterwatch efficiently organised by us.

Mr A. met me again after a couple of days and said he had brought a very disquieting piece of news. "The police", he told me, "have somehow found out that you are removing your things to different places in the city. They are holding consultations about rounding up all your Party members. You conveyed a black suitcase to a house at Mohini Road, and they followed you all the way. They are to raid that house too in addition to many others ; the list of houses and men is being prepared. They have so far decided to arrest forty men and women. The exact time and date for these arrests is not fixed yet, and I shall inform you about this later".

Now this man, Mr. A. was a mystery. I had long known from facts ascertained about him that he was an informer. He had not been, moreover, so fast a friend of mine as he professed to be. He was only a casual acquaintance before the Islamia

College Theft Case took place, and had no doubt played false to the fellow-students involved in it. He had, on the other hand, always tried to help me. The valuable information that he had given me lately was obviously correct.

Taking my hand in his, he looked sadly at me and cried, "Try to benefit from the knowledge that is so precious in this hour of peril for you." I was deeply impressed by his expression of good-will, and replied, "I will." Then he left me.

I conveyed the information I had received to Pandit Inderpal and the rest of our comrades. We held constitutions about what should be done. Opinions on the subject differed. One view was that we should all abscond without further delay, and I was one of those who subscribed to this view. The other alternative for us was to remain where we were and court arrest. Pandit Inderpal advocated this line of action. This difference of opinion was, however, due to the fact that we had no money to enable us to go far enough. The members from outside Lahore had already gone. We could have done the same if we had the necessary money No definite decision was arrived at when Yashpal dropped in and was informed of the whole situation. His response was quick, and spontaneous ; "I can give you some money." he said, "and also leave with you the addresses of a few persons who can provide you with shelter until the situation improves. It is most dangerous for you to stay here any more."

Pandit Inderpal turned down this offer of help, saying that his suggestions were not practicable.

It must be recalled here that it was due to his differences with Yashpal that the Pandit had decided to form an independent group of his own. We had been helping in the activities organised by Yashpal, the provincial organiser of the main Party, because our cause and creed were one, and because we felt it our duty to serve the interests of the revolutionary movement. But we had always kept the entity of our group separate. Pandit Inderpal was definitely of the opinion that our merging into the main Party was sure to slow down the

process of our work. He was an energetic type of man who would carry out his own programme rather than wait for another's orders tardily given and half-heartedly obeyed. He was particularly dissatisfied with the way Yashpal worked. The fear of losing our identity as well as usefulness for the cause was the real reason for his refusal.

Yashpal did not insist. He only warned us of the danger that awaited us if we did not move out of the house at once. He then left.

It was decided at last that Pandit Inderpal, Rupchand and Jahangiri Lal and his two brothers should remain to court arrest and the rest should abscond. Amrik Singh and I left the Krishan Nagar house, but we did not leave Lahore. We needed money. We had a plan to rob the railway octroi post on the next day just before sunset, when there would be enough money in the cash box there. I had put forth the proposal hinting that Pandit Inderpal would also agree to abscond if we had enough money. The dacoity would have been committed but for the meeting which took place between Mr. A. and myself.

Mr. A. brought the news that the police had trebled their guard around us as they had come to know that we were disappearing one by one. An emergency meeting had been held in the C. I. D. office on the previous night. We were to be arrested at about 3 o' Clock in the morning of the 26th of August.

It was on the 23rd of August that I met Mr. A. To attempt a dacoity with the police shadowing us at every step was futile. Next day they followed us openly without any pretence at concealment. We found it difficult even to meet under these circumstances. It was necessary for me to see Pandit Inderpal before absconding. I sent word to him to come to the Gurudutt Bhawan Library in the evening.

Pandit Inderpal arrived on a bicycle followed by Jahangiri Lal on a tricycle (he had lost his legs in a railway accident many years before) towards the appointed place, and they had hardly stepped into the premises when I caught sight of several

policemen in plain clothes alighting from their bicycles and taking their position along the main road. I was closely observing their movements from inside the library and wondering whether they would follow my comrades into the library. They left their machines behind trees and began to saunter lazily around the place. Had they dared to enter we would have been forced to flee. Instead we held a meeting. It was to all appearance the last chance of coming together of friends who had staked their lives for a common cause, the cause of our country's freedom. We embraced one another.

I made my last attempt to persuade my friends to abscond. This, I pointed out, was the last chance we had for escape.

Pandit Inderpal raised his head from the library table, looked at me and smiled. That smile had a touch of pain about it. Our plans had never made any provision for defence. Lack of money had settled things for us definitely and finally. At this critical moment I could not help thinking of the Pandit's refusal of Yahspal's offer. We had our differences with the main Party, but was it right to reject that offer at such a moment as this, when all our plans were in jeopardy?

Suddenly the Pandit, waking from his reverie, exclaimed. "Look here? we can't stay any longer in this place. Let us go away before they pounce upon us."

We rose from our seats and he said to me "Don't you worry about us. We will stick to our decision. There is no other way open to us. We were right in refusing assistance from Yashpal. It is no use working under his instructions. We would have become dependent upon him without even having the satisfaction of working to our heart's content. We should stand on our own feet even though we may take our cue from one another."The immediate question before now is, where should you go? I think Rawalpindi will be a safe place for you to spend two or three months, by which time the police would have finished with their investigation."

I suggested Jammu. I liked Bhag Ram's company, and moreover, it was easy for him to provide a shelter elsewhere if his

place became unsafe. The Pandit objected on the grounds that Bhag Ram might have been followed because of his frequent visits to us in the last month or two. The Rawalpindi comrades were, on the other hand, under no suspicion by the police, and could even help me to cross the Frontier if occasion demanded. I said, I had been only once to that city, and that too for not more than an hour, and did not know where our comrades lived.

There had been a steady influx of C. I. D. men in the vicinity in the meanwhile. They were whispering and talking in low tones, and were moving closer towards us. They still seemed to be hesitating, one of their reasons being, the slowly but steadily approach of darkness.

Pandit Inderpal hurriedly exclaimed, "Everybody there knows the name of Hari Ram Pahlwan. Go, we should clear away from the place now."

We did not have the time even to shake hands. My companions went out without looking back. I slipped into the verandah of the library since it was comparatively darker. I saw my comrades cross the Gurudutt Bhawan garden, but the C. I. D. men who were now inside the premises did not follow them. I moved farther into the darkness.

The C. I. D. men stepped inside and went straight into the library room. They stayed there for a while, and then, getting out took the road coming from the Ravi. I too left the place and walked in the opposite direction towards the river.

I crossed the Ravi bridge in entire darkness and stopped for a few minutes to see if I was being followed. There were big trees on either side of the road, making the darkness around me denser. Even the road was not visible. I was heading towards Shahdara Railway Station and had to keep to the railway line for fear of going astray. On one side was a long wide stretch of green grass undulating like a broad wave. It cast a strange spell around me. I kept on moving.

CHAPTER VI

THE "HANDS UP!" CEREMONY

I reached Shahdara Station and caught the train for Rawalpindi at about 11 o'clock. Arriving at Rawalpindi in the morning I went straight to Bazaar Talwaran. I had been there before. I learnt that Hari Ram Pahlwan had gone to Murree. Another comrade, Saran Dass, had a shop in the Bazaar Talwaran. I was told that he had given it up. There was no one else I knew There was nothing for me but to return to Lahore. I had not even the tonga fare, and reached the railway station on foot. I entrained for Lahore without even a drink of water all day, and was back in Lahore about twenty-four hours after the meeting in the library. It was the night of the 26th August. I happened to look at a newspaper; there was no news of any arrest at Lahore. When I came out of the Railway Station, someone placed his hand on my shoulder from behind and asked, "Where are you going"? It was the ubiquitous Mr. A. He had obviously something up his sleeve. I had a vague expectation that he would give me the worst yet news. I told him I had some piece of work at Lahori Gate and was going there.

"Do not be so rash as to fall straight into the clutches of the police! Come along with me if you do not want to be a willing victim."

He was an enigma. I followed him with curiosity, with confidence and without fear of being betrayed. I felt confident he could wish the whole of our Party go to hell but not me! This police informer had taken upon himself the self-imposed duty of warning me against danger. He kept watch over my movements and had always something important to tell me whenever we met, always seeming a bit too solicitous. There was a tension, a strain somewhere in my mind, there was the feeling that he was between us. Circumstances had placed me in a position where neither of us could be frank. We maintained a respectful distance, because there was nothing common between us, there was in fact a vast difference of outlook. He could never

influence me in the direction he wanted, nor could I ever win him over to mine. I was grateful to him that he felt so concerned about me, and somehow, I did not have the least suspicion that he could play foul. In spite of our contradictory political interests, in spite of the vast gap between our mental outlooks we, strangely enough, had a sort of basic understanding, a mutual sympathy. Such is life. Since I was the beneficiary in this, odd almost incredible relationship, I was naturally grateful.

We skirted the Circular Gardens and reached the Masti Gate, the quietest part of the city He told me that my comrades of the Krishan Nagar house, as well as many others had been arrested and searches of several houses had been carried out. He warned me that the police were very active in their search for me and that I could not evade arrest if I took a single false step. "Why do you take so much risk, walking on the main roads, in broad daylight? he asked with added anxiety.

Then I told him the truth. "I have no money." He gave me a five-rupee note.

"Be more careful," he said, and went away after shaking hands with me.

Next morning I chanced upon Puran Singh, a friend and a former class fellow of mine. He insisted that I should take shelter in his house, which was situated in the neibourhood of my home. I could rather have spent the day in a place farther away but he said he would close the doors and windows of his *Baïthak* and no one would know of my presence there. I accompanied him to his house. He gave me food. I had nothing to eat now for two days. Immediately afterwards I fell asleep.

At about five o'clock, Puran Singh's elder brother returned from his office and his wife told him that someone was staying in Puran's *Baithak* with all the doors and windows closed. He at once rushed into the *Baithak*, opened the windows and remarked without hiding his surprise at seeing me. "How could you sleep in such heat; why don't you let a breath of fresh air in?" He knew me but he showed no sign of recognition and went away.

I could now see the police patrolling the path leading to my house which was but a stone's throw from Puran Singh's *Baithak.* I slipped out and went into the Khalsa High School which was closed in these days for vacations. I had to remain in the school premises till nightfall as everybody around the place knew me. The anxiety about the plight of my arrested comrades continuously oppressed me. Police investigation, I knew, would be aimed at wreaking vengeance rather than ascertaining facts.

An hour later Puran Singh came and told me that my brother Amrik Singh had been arrested at Gowal Mandi. It was sad news. I had to be more cautious.

The sun had not yet set and I was sitting on my feet, wondering how Amrik Singh, who had left the city three days earlier, happened to be in Lahore, when a black snake crept away from between my legs, touching my shalwar. It shook me out of my reverie and a nervous tremor ran through my body. I did not move till it had gone away. I thought of the ignoble, miserable death that it might have brought me in comparison with what I might meet on the gallows, for the sake of my country. The daylight was still lingering but I came out of the school compound at the back of the science room. I had read for years in these rooms and was now bidding good-bye to the memories connected with them. I halted for a moment in the playground and then passed from it towards Mohini Road. I went into the open fields far, far away from the city.

On the morning of 28th of August, I sent for some of my friends (not connected with the Party), including Mr. A. in order to obtain some money as well as information regarding the activities of the police. Puran Singh brought me food. The next to arrive was Rajinder Singh, a class-fellow and neighbour of mine. He knew my brothers and I had asked him to go to their shop and bring me some money. He told me that their shop was closed as they had gone to attend a marriage at Simla. Nor could he himself render any help because of the visit of a police party to his house. Rajinder

Lal, a friend who lived at Mohini Road, had taken charge of a number of suspicious articles which we were forced to remove from our Krishan Nagar house in a hurry. He felt so scared, however, that he passed them on without my knowledge to Rajinder Singh, our common friend. Rajinder Lal was arrested on the 26th August. Rajinder Singh threw the articles left by him into a well. The police had obviously some clue; they were questioning him and his uncle.

My third friend, Mr. A, too, had come and was wistfully looking on while I talked with other friends. He was both a friend and an enemy. His enmity was dormant, his friendship active. I had called him today, not to ask for any help but because I wanted him to know, that I regarded him as a trustworthy friend. I was leaving Lahore for an indefinite period and wanted to bid him farewell.

We sat down on the grass on the other side of the dry river-bed. It was the most oppressive day of the season. The air was still, and even the grass and the stagnant water in the river-bed looked depressed. We too looked uncomfortable, as we sat together, though for different reasons.

"You are in a very serious mood, Mr. A," I remarked.

He said with a sigh, "The question troubling my mind is whether we would ever meet again."

"That was why I wanted to see you," I said, "I am leaving Lahore and won't be able to meet you, whether I succeed in evading arrest or not ; it may be our last meeting."

He was visibly moved by my sincerity and said with warmth of feeling, "I have made many fruitless efforts to turn your mind from dangerous activities. I shall make one last attempt. Look here, I think I might be able to save you with the help of my relative in the C. I. D. if you promise not to take part in terrorist activities any more. Most of the members of your Party have been arrested ; you could hardly accomplish anything by persisting alone against the heavy odds that are daily accumulating against you. What will you gain by wasting your life? Whom will you be helping by doing so?

Here, was the policeman speaking in him,-or was it only the friend?. The sincerity of his expression made me take his words at face value. I thanked him for the proferred help and said, "There is no going back for me, Mr. A., the path before me is clear. My duty is my guide. I cannot possibly think on the lines suggested by you. I never worked in the Party with the reservation that I would save my skin some day. I am quite satisfied with what I have been able to do, and entertain no misgivings about my future, nor should you. Let us hope for the best."

My words sounded foreign to his ears; his complexion darkened, and he turned his eyes towards the ground. Tears came into his eyes, and he sobbed. Neither I nor my friend had expected this outburst of feeling. I would not take as dark a view of things as he did because of the youthful feeling in me that I was yet free and might hope to remain so. I did not know that there were only a few hours left.

We parted with our hearts heavy with emotion. I had informed Puran Singh that I would pass the night in Gurudutt Bhawan and would wait there for him before I left in the morning.

Rajinder Singh and Puran Singh were both arrested that night. I went into a vacant room of Gurudutt Bhawan building, locking it from inside and went to sleep. It was hot and the room swarmed with mosquitoes. The police had apparently got the scent that I was to spend the night there. They searched for me in verandahs, in the garden and everywhere but had no idea that I was inside a locked room. I left for the river side early in the morning, and reaching the other side of the bridge, I fell into heavy slumber - I was so tired.

At about 10 o'clock I felt thirsty and went to a well nearby. A cyclist was in sight on the road at a distance of about two hundred paces from the well. His manner of looking and his movements aroused suspicion. I hid behind some trees and he rode away. Apart from the rest stood a mulberry tree all

alone in a wide stretch of ground. A crow began to caw angrily as I went under the tree. All of a sudden it rushed at me and I had to scare it away with my hand. I saw that it had its young ones in the nest on the tree.

A moment or two later, someone shouted, "Sardarji, wait a bit; we have some business with you." Turning my head, I saw two men striding towards me. I began to run across the fields through the standing maize crop. Many whistles rang through the air and scores of men rushed from all sides, whereas there were only two to be seen an instant before. I was arrested.

One of them twisted the collar of my shirt harder and harder till I began to suffocate; another handcuffed me. I smiled at the man who was still pulling hard at my neck. I thought that all was over and gave a smiling farewell to the green garden which I had seen countless times, and was to see no more. I had lived here from my childhood; the moment of parting had come. It was like the cutting of a living thing in two, like the severance of a hand, like an amputation as it were. It was an event of tremendous import in my life, irrespective of what the future might bring. And yet it did not cast me down; I felt a strange elation within me. The effect of a catastrophic change was in my blood; it made me warm, as though I were drunk. My smiles were like sparks from the anvil of fate. The policemen grew nervous. Unable to comprehend the meaning of my bright looks, they thought I was expecting intervention and help from my companions, and shouted, "Hold him tight. May be he is not alone, search him thoroughly ; he may have some deadly thing in his possession ?"

I did not look agitated. In spite of the strange sense of elation I felt my heart was beating normally. Perhaps a defensive mechanism of my nervous system was at work in this extremely perilous situation or was it that I felt that the honour of my country and the revolutionary cause was at stake in every gesture I made? My captors, on the other hand, were comparatively in a state of commotion, and were looking far from normal. Perhaps the very sordidness of their motives made all

the difference. I had the advantage of the nobility of my cause over those men. The sang-froid that I found in myself was the gift of the innumerable revolutionaries and martyrs that had given meaning to the story of mankind. I instinctively smiled again.

They took me towards Mohini Road. Large fields of cauliflower lay near my path and their green looked almost black-the colour of mourning. We reached the house of Pandit Iqbal Nath, an acquaintance of mine. The Pandit had willingly obliged the police by offering them the use of his house to organise my arrest. Partap Singh D. S. P., was sitting there waiting for me. He ordered a sub-inspector to search me thoroughly and told the organised police parties to retire. He waved me into a chair. I asked for a glass of water, which was brought by a professor, a tenant in Pandit Iqbal Nath's house. The Pandit also came in. The smile of recognition on his lips was typical of the callousness of an old and worldly wise man.

CHAPTER VII
MEET THE ADVERSARY

THEY drove me to Akbari Mandi Police Station, also called Durli Jatha Police Station. Durli Jatha was the name of a special branch of the C.I.D. dealing with cases of habitual Criminals. This branch was reputed to be more skilful in extract ing confessions and breaking the will of obdurate suspects than the ordinary police.

It is not my aim to reproduce a day-to-day diary describing the emotional details and bringing out in relief the momentary significance of bygone events. Now I can only look back on what I was more than fifteen years ago. I was in the hands of the police. The hatred against these hirelings, these running dogs of a foreign tyrannical power as I would have described them then, was in those days one of the necessary conditions of

my existence. It burned like incense offered to the God of revolution. It was in my bones, my blood. I have changed in this respect, almost become unrecognisable, from the being that I was. We do not sleep in time, but continue chewing the cud of our thoughts; so that we reach altogether different planes of being. I underwent a process of growth throughout the period of my imprisonment though the prison is exclusively meant to curtail and restrict movement not only in the physical sphere but also in the mental. A political prisoner, however, thinks under all conditions and never allows his inner urge for progress to die out. I go back in retrospect to the former times, not in a spirit of hatred and revenge, but with a view to presenting reality as it was.

In the Akbari Mandi Police Station, they put fetters on my feet and fastened the chain to the foot of a charpai. The chain of my handcuffs was held by a police constable sitting beside me. I could move my hands, I could also move my legs and lie down or go to sleep. For two days no responsible police officer came to interrogate me. I learnt the art of taking food with cuffed hands: There was no conscious suffering; only a physically restricted body lay uncomfortably in unhealthy surroundings. I was mentally preparing, mustering my strength for the fight to come. The present was nothing in comparison with the future, I thought, and impatiently wished the state of suspense to end. "Why do they not begin torturing me?" I asked myself again and again.

The police officers began to come now and then; they put a question or two to me in a casual way and went away. They were mostly occupied in interrogating other suspects, alleged thieves, dacoits, etc, in their custody. On the fourth day of my arrest, I saw them beat a young man and a middle-aged one. Their anger found expression in hurling dirty abusesand flogging the poor convicts. The suspects did not confess their guilt and the policemen placed the hands of each of them beneath the feet of a charpai till the miserable beings rent the heavens with their cries. I looked at the constables sitting on the charpais

of their victim. They sat there unconcerned, their faces unruffled by pity as their victims shrieked. Who gave them the authority to inflict such barbarous punishment? Wherefrom did they come to possess the power to do so much evil, so much injustice? They never seemed to ask themselves such questions. I could not help wondering at their inhuman impassivity to the suffering they caused, though I was expecting no mercy myself and wanted to raise no question of pity. The shrieks of the victims lingered long in my ears. The suspects were entitled to a revenge, I felt. They were let off two days afterwards because they did not confess or perhaps because they had, in fact, nothing to confess.

This was not the only example of cruelty that the police officers set before me with the idea, no doubt, of softening me beforehand. It was indeed nothing much of an example, but a routine business that was carried out whenever any suspected person did not yield to their verbal threats and abuse. The drama of human misery and degradation with its beastly acts continued as one man's punishment became the sequel to another's and so on. My hatred for the police was intensified.

A week passed. A sub-inspector was now deputed to interrogate me. He said, he would ask for nothing but the truth from me.

"I have had a sample of how you treat innocent men when they happen to be under suspicion, however false that suspicion may be,, I challenged.

"We would be declared incompetent and dismissed from service in no time, if we did not know how to make the criminals confess their crimes," he said lightly, patting me twice or thrice on the back, adding, "But they were ill-bred, illiterate people of low families. No one is going to treat you like that."

Looking more amiable than he was, and trying to be more friendly than he could be, he asked, 'When did you join the Party?"

"I know nothing about any party. I am a student of Khalsa School,, I replied.

"A student ! But why should a student work for putting decoy-bombs at six different places to kill the police ; what grievance could he have to perpetrate such a cruelty on us?"

He continued smiling affably for a minute or two after saying these words. He had confronted me with the truth and was observing its effect upon me. He then repeated his question. "When did you join the Party?"

I told him that I knew nothing about bomb-making and was not a member of any Party.

He went on putting questions to me even when I persisted in being silent. He was trying to confuse me with bold assertions of truth and to tire me with repetitions. He left me alone after sunset.

The same tactics were repeated the next afternoon. He was quite angry before he left and hurled his first filthy epithet at me, as a warning of what was in the offing.

When he left, the Havildar in charge of me sat beside me on the charpai and began to eulogise him. "This sub-Inspector," he 'confided' in me, "is the gentlest of them all. He has never beaten a single suspect with his own hands. He says his Namaz five times daily, and neither speaks a falsehood nor takes bribe. Don't you feel that he has talked kindly to you? Compare him with other officers who will treat you cruelly. Your own folly and stubbornness may bring about such a misfortune, but I think you are intelligent enough to appreciate my point as well as my sympathy."

He stopped to let me have my meals, and resumed when I had finished. He noted the fact that I was not impressed by his talk and started me on a conversation that had nothing to do with my political activities. He made me tell him about my school life, my childhood, my brothers, my late father's position in the village, and so on, until it was midnight and my eye-lids became heavy with sleep, but he would not let me sleep; only then I knew his game.

He remained there for about two hours more and then gave his charge to the two constables on guard over me. I was however able to snatch about half an hour's sleep in the morning when one of the constables awakened me in a hurry, saying, "Beware ! The sub-Inspector has come."

He was in a genial mood and praised me a little before making preposterous allegations against some of my comrades under arrest. He blackened their character, making attacks of a personal nature, and in contrast spoke highly of my gentle habits, my youthful age, sincerity, and even my spirit of sacrifice. "How could you work side by side with people like them? An intelligent boy like you ought to have understood that they were pushing you in the forefront of danger, sneaking back themselves in order to save their skins. Cunning rascals they are, I say, and the sooner you understand their true character the better it would be for you." He went on in this strain for a long time, and I saw that the had been greatly misinformed about the character of our Party members, because he could not even make plausible accusations against them. He too realised that his insinuations were wide of the mark, and changing his tactics as well as tone, observed, "There are one or two young men, no doubt, of a selfless, sacrificing nature, and I have nothing to say against them."

I had neither admitted my acquaintance with most of my comrades, nor shown any resentment at the attacks on their moral character, but he must have noted some changes in my facial expression because I was not so impassive as I ought to have been at the time. I said I was dead tired, as I had not been allowed to sleep last night, and requested him to permit me to rest for a while.

"But you were asleep when I came in," he remarked coldly, twirling his moustaches.

"I had slept only for half an hour."

"Then you must have been very uneasy in your mind. Speak out the truth and you will have all the sleep you want," he replied, and resumed his interrogation, without giving me a chance to make any more complaints about lack of sleep.

His patience soon wore out, and he began to abuse and slap me. I was a little more than seventeen, and could hate with all the unreasonableness of my age. I refused to answer his questions even with a nod of my head. He changed his insulting attitude and employed milder means of persuation. His visits became shorter and the intervals between them longer.

I was surprised to learn after a fortnight of my stay here that I was being transferred to Lahore Fort. The police constable who usually "forgot" to pull the chain of my handcuffs for an hour or a half in the night had given me this information.

"The sub-Inspector was only carrying out a preliminary investigation; the real test will take place in the Fort," he had said, not by way of a threat but as a friendly hint. The Havildar, taking a more professional view of things, said, "I had already told you to give up your obstinate attitude. Now suffer the consequences, you unfortunate young man!"

Jawahar Lal, Inspector-in-charge of Durli Jatha, who had taken no part in questioning me, was also displeased with me and said, "There would have been no need to send you to the Fort, had you been fair towards us. Now you will be sent to a place where there is no culture, no British rule; where Moghal times still persist. Remember my words: I am a Hindu officer and could not treat you badly. The Mohammedans there will have no such consideration."

His father too was an Inspector of Police. Himself a fat-bellied man of medium height with the cast of a bully, he was overproud of his talents. I had seen enough of him to understand that he was bombastic like thunder and imposing like threatening dark clouds that do not rain The fate of suspects depended upon his whims. He had the power to send persons to trial on the slightest suspicion, or to release full-fledged criminals if he chose. He was evidently sorry he was not given a chance to employ his talents in extorting a confession from me, and was jealous of the Mohammedan officers who might get promotion if they succeeded in making cut a big case against me and other arrested comrades.

On the evening of 13th September, at about dusk a prisoners' van arrived to take me to the Fort. A group of semi-naked children playing outside the Akbari Mandi PoliceStation began to shout in chorus "Thief ! Thief!" as I entered the van. Even the older people could have taken me for a wild criminal because I had neither bathed nor changed my clothes for the past fifteen days, and sleeplessness had added to the wildness of my appearance. The van sped like an arrow on its path, seeing nothing, feeling and hearing nothing, and reached the gate of the Fort when It began to asce slowely the C.I.D. offices situated higher up. Young men with the gloomiest prospects before them were confined in a dark part of this place associated with the names of glorious Mohammedan and Sikh princes of our recent history.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE BATS CLING TO THE ROOF

I WAS taken to a cell. An overwhelming force of mosquitoes greeted me as I stepped inside. They were happy, it seemed, to find me plump and healthy.

In the morning I was made to appear before Partap Singh, D.S.P.,who was the head of the police parties which had gone to arrest me. I had a full night's rest in spite of the mosquitoes and was feeling refreshed and clear in my mind, and fit to suffer the process of police "investigation," the meaning of which was slowly becoming clear to me.

Partap Singh bade me take my seat and moved his chair nearer. He looked like an unlettered Jat, educated by the experiences of life, which had given him the proverbial shrewdness of that class. One could not, on the first impression, suspect him of possessing the calculating mind of a Jew. He was a much deeper personality than Jawahar Lal of Durli Jatha, who looked just a bully.

He asked me no questions. He told me things, making a show of complete knowledge, without the necessity of obtaining information about the case from me. Nevertheless, being a Sikh, he naturally desired to help a young fellow-religionist of his. He was, however, willing to give me the credit for revealing important secrets if I only went on nodding in affirmation to his questions. I was required to do no more than point out that he was speaking something untrue when such was the case.

His self-confidence was amazing, his words had an air of certainty; he had explained himself in a simple, plain and matter-of-fact way. What a great D.S.P. he was with the face of a hardy villager!

I smiled a little and said, "The patience of police officers is soon exhausted, and they automatically resort to the use of force and abusive language when they find that their intelligence is of no avail. The sub-Inspector in Akbari Mandi came out in his true colours on the third day of his interrogation. I can say nothing about you, but I had a gratuitous experience of your methods at the cost of non-political suspects there. You will perhaps pursue a method apparently but not essentially different from that of the Inspector-in-Charge of Durli Jatha. He thunders with a lightning flash and you might try to put cold water into my veins. He has let me go after a fortnight, but you will persist in persecuting me till I collapse. Go on, since I must remain a victim of your unending suspicions and accusations and since there is no alternative for me but to go through the ordeal."

In fact he and Jawahar Lal seemed to me to be the arms of a single monstrous mechanical being, one of which was pressing me to the ground and the other showing a closed fist. Partap Singh, too deep to be fathomed, was not a bit offended and smilingly remarked, "You are suspicious, because I am a police officer. You look red-hot ; but I know that hot things by themselves cool down with time. Heat is a false stimulant that blows raw minds like yours towards unreal heights, and ought not to be applied to personal life-and-death problems."

He then told me that several of my comrades had given statements and that the full story of our "crimes" was out.

"Do you know Inderpal ? " he asked.

"No!" I replied.

"Are you against the British Raj ?"

"No!" was my seemingly innocent reply.

"I have purposely asked these questions to elicit these "noes" from you, in order to make you realise how childish you are in the face of very serious charges that will be proved against you in the court."

He then began to describe briefly the activities of our Party, mentioned many names, and related several important events without, however, telling the particular roles played by individual members. He observed me closely to note my reactions. I could neither deny nor admit anything, and was trying my best to appear unaffected at these disclosures.

Summing up the case against me, he remarked, "You and your brother Amrik Singh will get capital punishment for two murders in the conspiracy. Are you incapable of realising, even after what I have told you, that some of your associates have completely betrayed you ? Would you play the sucker ? They have betrayed you, and yet you are willing to become the scape-goat ?"

He stopped to hear what I had to say about these things. Seeing me still silent, he touched my shoulders and exclaimed : "Will you never grow up ? Don't dream. Face the reality as it lies revealed before you !"

He had risen from his seat in expectation of an answer. When I did not give any, he calmly asked me to think over these things at leisure in the cell at night. His parting shot was, "If you need my help, tell me frankly. I shall come to your rescue even though I am literally encircled here by Mohammedan staff who are not on good terms with me ." Then he ordered me back to the lock-up.

He had indeed given me much to think over. Many secrets were out. I could not imagine who had betrayed us. I had full faith in the comrades with whom I had worked, but the majority of the arrested persons, numbering about forty, were unknown to me. The plan obviously was to make us victims of an elaborate frame-up by involving persons who had little to do with us. The simultaneous bomb-outrages in six different places were the main action of our Party, in which not more than half a dozen persons had taken part. I knew that Yahspal, Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad, and other members of the Party were still at large. Whence came these forty men? What had they done? How many of them were playing into the hands of the police? These questions pestered me, but I found no answer. It was not surprising that under the circumstances, Partap Singh held the threat of capital punishment to me. Perhaps they could bring this off, with all the resources they had at their command or was he deliberately exaggerating the danger to scare me and beat down my resistance? It was ridiculous to think of being "saved" through his help, when so much falsehood was being piled up against us! The atmosphere was highly intriguing. I had been sent late into the Fort. I was in the dark about what had happened to those who were brought there earlier. I also wanted to find out the names, if nothing else, of those confined there. The constables on duty talked little of things in which I was interested. Yet they were the only possible source of information. In spite of their reticence, they were but human, and so I was gradually getting information, gaining some knowledge. I learnt, for example, that one of us, Dharam Vir of Lyallpur, had gone through the severest ordeal.

I looked out of my cell as far as I could see, with my hands on the bars. For a long while I followed the movement of the police constable in plain clothes, who was bringing meals, one by one, for the arrested persons, and knew some of the cells where they were confined. Suddenly I heard the voice of

Amrik Singh quarrelling over the bad quality of the food given to him. When the man brought my food I, too, complained loudly, thus making my presence known to Amrik Singh.

My cell was damp, there being no outlet for water used by me for bathing, etc., and the mosquitoes here were wondrous fat. It was, I imagined, perhaps due to the fact that they were descendants of those who had sucked the blood of great warriors of by-gone days. The fat blood-suckers were not afraid of human beings. I was not permitted to switch off the electric light in the cell. I dragged my bed nearer the bars of the door, and lay down looking outside. A talkative constable was on duty, and I whiled away my time in idle gossip with him. I slept very late.

The D. S. P. called me again to his office next day. He told me that my brother had confessed his guilt, and advised me to do the same. "I shall try to save both of you in face of all opposition that the Mohammedan D. S. P. may offer in this connection," he declared, and added, "I hope I shall, by the grace of the Guru, succeed in diminishing considerably the weight of the serious charges against you, if you only speak out the truth, which is already known to me, and thus strengthen my hands."

I asked him to tell me what Amrik Singh had confessed. "He had told us that both of you brothers went to Gujranwala and managed the bomb-explosion there that resulted in the death of a police officer" he said, laying stress on every syllable and looking straight into my eyes.

I gave no reply and he impatiently cried:

"Do not try in vain to look like a hardened criminal,your face is like an open book. The uneasiness writ large on it shows clearly that you understand how matters stand. Come out with the truth."

"The truth is that you are framing charges against both of us and many others. You are asking me to believe impossible things

about my brother, I would request you to let me see him if there is an iota of truth in what you have just said about him," I demanded, feeling very hurt.

The D. S. P. was taken aback at this sudden and unexpected outburst of feeling on my part. "It is not in my power to let you meet," he said lamely.

"Bring me a statement signed by him or even a chit in his handwriting, and I shall know that you are telling me the truth."

"We do not take the signatures of accused persons confessing their guilt, but I can assure you in other ways that all the arrested persons have given their full statements and nothing remains hidden from us now," he replied, with evident displeasure at my critical attitude.

He then gave me the startling news that Pandit Inderpal, Saran Das, Shiv Ram, and Khairati Ram were going to be made approvers in the case along with one or two others. "The whole burden of the case will fall on you and your brother," he warned.

This was the most powerful weapon in his armoury and he used it slowly and deliberately. He ridiculed my studied composure and told me again and again that I was taking undue advantage of his leniency.

"Do you know what would have happened to you had you been under the charge of a Mohammedan D. S. P.?" he asked.

"Your question hints about what is going to happen to me," I observed.

"You are a fool," he said, " to think so; what need have we to compel you to tell what is already known to us beyond even the shadow of a doubt? I have protected you so far and shall continue to do so, but a hard fate awaits you, if you do not realise the treacherous role your friends have played against you. I shall give you further proofs of their treachery and you should then calmly decide what is the most advisable step for you to take. Save yourself and your brother from the scaffold. I am ready to give you all the help I can. A statement from you is the only course left for you."

He then gave orders to the sentry to take me back to my cell.

I gathered from my talk with the sentries on duty that I and some other comrades were not brought earlier into the Fort because arrangements for our accommodation were not complete, and a new staff was yet to be called. This information clearly exposed the hypocrisy of the D. S. P.'s claim that he had protected me from the methods of torture that might have been employed against me by the Mohammedan officers for extorting a confesion.

The Fort was nothing more than the Akbari Mandi Police Station on a larger scale, except for its awe-inspiring buildings and its labyrinthine passages. The police here used the same methods as were used there. There were only about a dozen lock-ups in all in the Fort, and persons considered more dangerous were confined in them. The rest usually remained fastened to charpais placed in dark, dirty corners or improvised investigation rooms, or farther away in the dark dingy Hathi Khana of old times, now swarming with bats. Here and there a human animal lay crouching, hands and feet bound, on a charpai beside a pillar of this Hathi Khana. The place had, however, an advantage denied to those confined elsewhere. One could whisper and even have a chance of talking to one another if one were cautious enough.

One day a Mohammedan Inspector of police came to my cell along with a Havildar and began to question me about the cost of the manufacture of coins and other connected matters. I did not reply. In addition to the usual filthy abuse I received a severe beating. He continued this method of investigation for two days more and then gave me up. Some other officers also came to question me on different occasions but they did nothing beyond showing their exceeding contempt for me.

Partap Singh had not called me for a couple of days, and I was a bit surprised when a Havildar came to take me to his office one morning. He had always something terrible to tell me, and I wondered what new thing I would learn that day. He was busy and told the Havildar to wait outside for some

minutes. The Havildar took me aside from the main entrance to the office, and seated me beneath a window in the back wall of a room from where I could overhear a part of the conversation that the D. S. P. was carrying on with a Hindu Inspector of Police.

My ears cought the words "Pahari Brahman," then the full sentences "he is unreliable," "all others should be made witnesses under 164." It was Partap Singh speaking. The other officer's voice could not be heard at all. They were talking in English and the Havildar could understand nothing. He was busy conversing in low tones with the constable on duty. I was called in about fifteen minutes later.

The D. S. P. was there alone. He greeted me with a questioning smile. "Your friend Inderpal has accepted the King's pardon along with four others. What do you say about that?"

The news was in the air. I had heard it from the lips of the constable on duty before my cell, and from other sources too. I made a show, however, of utter disbelief.

The D. S. P. said with emphasis, "He is to get the King's pardon tomorrow. There is yet a chance for you. I can do for you what Syed Ahmad Shah (the D. S. P. in whose charge Inderpal was) is doing for the *Pahari Brahman.* He will not succeed, whereas I will, if you but say the word. Give me your full statement today and you will see that your life and that of Amrik Singh is saved. I assure you that Amrik Singh will not even be prosecuted. I feel I am offering you a fair deal. It is not as a Police Officer but as a real well-wisher of both of you that I make this offer. Think it over calmly but quickly because the time is short."

Now I could make out, from the bits of talk overheard a few minutes before, that he was not in favour of the King's pardon being granted to Pandit Inderpal. This was an encouraging piece of news which gladdened my heart. I refused to be persuaded by the D. S. P. and he had to send me back.

Back in my cell, I thought over the conversation I had overheard and tried to make out what it meant. Partap

Singh, I inferred, did not think that Pandit Inderpal was reliable enough to be made an approver. He wanted to put up only twelve accused for trial in the court and was in favour of setting the rest free on condition of their giving evidence under Section 164. He would have given short shrift to the main conspirators if he had his way. Half a dozen sentences and about the same number of life sentences—that was his plan for our case. Syed Ahmad Shah D. S. P. on the other hand, was embarking upon a much more ambitious programme of launching a big conspiracy case which would build him up as a master-mind in the Criminal Investigation Department. His policy prevailed.

The statement of approvers had been recorded in the presence of magistrates and now the police officers were feverishly busy preparing witnesses for the court. The result was an all-round slackening in threats, abuse and beatings that had been going on since our arrest. The sole concern of the police now was to bring in witnesses into the Fort and show us to them again and again, lest they fail to identify us in the court. We were given facilities for interviews with our relatives in the presence and hearing of police officers. One or two lawyers were also allowed to see some of us. Our complaints about bad food, lack of shaving and toilet facilities, etc., were listened to with a show of sympathy. This unexpected change was meant as an inducement for us to remain longer in their custody.

Some magistrates, sure tools in the hands of the police, had been so far giving remands without insisting that the accused be produced before them. Some magistrates, however, had visited us in the lock-up but without revealing their identity to us, nor had they even told us that they were granting a remand. A great disadvantage to most of us, raw youths hardly out of our teens, was our ignorance of legal procedure. We did not know what "remand" meant, nor did we know our rights regarding identification parades till much later. All that we thought of was that we must not break down under the barbarous methods of the police, that our capacity to suffer must always outstrip their capacity to make us suffer.

One of us, Harnam Singh of Sheikhupura, whose father and other near relatives were in police service, was conversant with the police methods as well as the legal rights and went on hunger-strik a few days after his arrest, demanding to be sent to the judicial lock-up. Later on, some others, too, insisted on this and succeeded in being transferred to jail. Those who had already had interviews with their legal advisers raised objections to further remands being given to the police. The police, however, secured a good many of us for fifteen days more. A fortnight later, the magistrate at last seemed to recover his lost sense of legal propriety and listened to our objections to any further remands being granted.

The police had, meanwhile, succeeded in cooking up an effective case, by daily showing us to the prosecution witnesses and coaching them in the statements they were required to give in the court. They felt confident of securing a conviction.

On the day of our departure from the Fort, Munni, the sweeper, to the amusement of the police constables who had gathered in the compound near the Hathi Khana, burst out in loud protest against attitude of the high officer against him. He threw down his latrine-broom, braced up his arms, and cried with all the weariness of the past two months' hard toil centred upon his brow. "What should Munni the unfortunate do? Die?" He wanted some reward in our case.

It was a great delight for some of us to see one another after a long spell of mental and physical suffering under police custody. Our ordeal was at an end. A lorry was standing by to take us to Jail. The comrades who had money gave a little to Munni the sweeper, who was by now subdued as a sub-Inspector had arrived. The poor fellow had given vent to unvarnished truth, but in vain. His protests were no more than an outlet for his long pent-up sense of misery. The outburst had only amused the constables: they might have felt real sympathy if Munni had displayed enough courage to be out-spoken in the presence of officers. The constables, most of them, had professed sympathy for us even when giving us a beating while the net that was to

strangle us was being woven around us. How much of the sympathy was genuine? The genuine outburst of feeling from Munni was a rare phenomenon in this terrible house of torture, the Lahore Fort, where neither the officers nor the persons in their custody could ever be wholly truthful and frank.

I am always reminded of an elderly figure of medium size, with a henna-coloured, elegant beard, whenever I go over the days spent in the Fort. He would come with a gentle gait, tarry for a while before one of us and utter, with a sweet, smiling expression on his face, remarks such as: "What a noble youth this one seems to be" or "who had the heart to touch these petals of youth roughly," or "I feel sorry you have been beaten by so and so; I shall tell him to do that no more while I am here!" He was the retired Deputy Superintendent, Niaz Ahmad Shah, an experienced old hand, temporarily recalled into service to help in building a case against us. He never took any direct part in the investigation, never questioned any of us. His sole business was to sit in his office scanning and reviewing files, documents, statements of the approvers, etc., in order to find out apparent flaws and probable defects in the prosecution story and give it the air of perfection before it went to the court. It was for others to build the slaughter house for us brick by brick: his sole task was to supply the design with the vision of an architect. Without ill-will he was labouring cheerfully at weaving, strand by strand, the rope that was to strangle us.

The third D. S. P., Syed Ahmad Shah, was in charge of the investigation as a whole. He had himself questioned several of the accused, but not me, though his subordinates did on several occasions try their hand at making me "speak." They employed force and abusive language. I came to know that Shah Sahib blamed Partap Singh for his inability to break my will because he had not employed the third degree methods necessary for obtaining such a result.

CHAPTER IX

THE JOY OF BEING TOGETHER AGAIN

WE entered the gates of the prison. I had no idea of what the inside of a prison would be like except some hazy notions of chains and fetters, and narrow subterranean cells. A jail officer entered our names, occupations, etc., in his register and sent us inside one by one. A jail warder and two convict Lambardars led me towards the cells, a long way off from the main gate. I was very calm and cautious, like the man who is prepared for all eventualities but does not know what each step further might reveal. I would have instinctively hit back if one of the men accompanying me had by chance touched me with his hand, but would have taken a beating calmly if he had first announced his intention

Some of the comrades had gone ahead, some were coming behind. We were placed in different rows of cells, three or four here, three or four there, with a view to keeping every batch isolated. We felt it was only a temporary arrangement and hoped to be put together in an association barrack when the case against us began in the court. The new-comers could not see the comrades who had arrived some days earlier. Each of us was locked in a separate cell without food, bedding and light. I stood for a while in the dark and was then able to discern a raised place on one side of which was the mud-berth meant for sleeping. I groped with my hands and found a small earthen pitcher full of water. I could feel nothing else in the cell. Lying down on the floor I soon fell asleep. The prison, was, after all, not a series of underground holes but only a place of inconvenience. It was, however, a far better place in comparison with the Lahore Fort.

We were let out of our cells in the morning for an hour, to go to the latrine, to bathe at the tap, to take our food and to talk together provided we kept to our respective rows. Pandit Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal, Kundan Lal, Jai Parkash and I were happy at our reunion, and talked about our experiences after we were arrested. I looked again and again at the prisoners

taking their meals in a queue in the barrack opposite our cells. Some of them came and chatted with us. I looked at the iron cups in their hands and at their dress consisting of shabby striped half-shirts and half-pyjamas, and felt it was a wretched, sub-human, beggarly life they led in the prison. The dress of a free man, meagre and poor though it might be, has no fixed, slavish pattern to conform to, but the prisoners are a branded caste with their cheerless, depressing unifromity. The prisoners were afraid of the warder and the convict Lambardars on duty over us, and did not stay for more than a few minutes. They had infringed jail rules in coming and talking to me. The warder on duty asked us to take our meals and locked us inside the cells before the Assistant Superintendent-in-charge came on his round. He informed us that we were acting against the instructions of the jail authorities by moving about freely outside our cells. We took our regular diet with a sense of freedom that obviously infringed several more jail rules before we went inside our cells.

A prisoner does not require much time to grow familiar with the pattern of jail life, as it is the same throughout days, months, years, with hardly any change. The jail manual—"Jail Man" in the jargon of prisoners, the antiquated code of laws for the prisoners, prescribes in detail a code of conduct for the prisoners as well as the administrators of the prison, and is full of impracticable, nay impossible, restrictions on the liberty of the prisoners, though it leaves much to the discretion of the jail staff. Rules forbid the prisoner to talk loudly, to sing, to laugh loudly, to leave his place unless so required and lays down the limit to his dress, diet, sleep, speech, work, movements, in short, every aspect of his life. It virtually amounts to the control of his appearance, his thoughts, the natural expression of his desire and needs. Breaking of many of the jail laws, rules and regulations is inherent in the situation. It is a necessary condition of living for the prisoners, and the realisation of it constituted our first impression of jail life.

The under-trial prisoners have the right to wear their own clothes and obtain their own food from outside if they can

afford to. They are, so to say, in transit, from freedom to slavery. But jail discipline meant for the prisoners applies to them as well. A stricter watch and ward was enforced upon us because we belonged to the "most dangerous" category of terrorists.

Back in my cell, I found my sweater and knickers missing. A search for these was carried out by the warder and the convict Lambardar on duty, but as the latter remarked jocularly,"There is no *thana* (police-station) here to report to" and nothing could be gained by lodging a complaint with the higher officers.

"Who could pessibly have stolen the things ?" I enquired from the Lambardar.

"Some prisoner, of course," he replied. "But what is the use when he won't be able to wear them himself?" I asked, getting more interested in the matter. The Lambardar smiled at my ignorance and replied with a wink at the warder standing outside: "He would sell them to a jail employee for a few cigarettes or a bit of opium or something like that and that is the sole consideration behind the theft."

He then told me how smuggling was carried on by the Jail warders, in spite of the strictest rules to the contrary, even at the risk of dismissal from service involved in it. A warder who got only seventeen rupees per month and had four to five children besides his wife or parents to look after was perforce obliged to supplement his earning by such questionable methods. The prisoners, he told me, were in a comparatively more miserable plight, deprived as they were of all enjoyable things,available to those outside jail, and that was why they could not do without smuggling.

This is a fight against oppression, against inhuman conditions, I thought, when the Lambardar had gone out. No morals could be drawn from the expedients resorted to under conditions of sheer necessity and abject helplessness.

Smuggling was expressive only of the struggle for existence and not for better or higher existence.

Prisons are hot beds of crime, a safe retreat from the civilizing influence of society. They are of the nature of a valve, thus providing a feeling of security and health to the society at large which, however, does not concern itself with the microbes, the vermin and the poisonous creatures that swarm in these wretched dens of misery and degradation. Only the opening and shutting of the iron doors of the prisons seems to provide them with fans for their perspiring faces and it is felt by those in authority that holding a balance between the influx and outflux of criminals is all that is necessary for keeping crime under control.

And who is a criminal ? Someone who has no regard for the feelings or the property, or even the ideas of another ; someone emotionally unhinged, no doubt. Crude desires demand crude satisfactions, and the man without finer susceptibilities finds himself one day under lock and key. There is an exclusive society of criminals and the equally harsh treatment meted out to all alike makes him feel himself placed in congenial surroundings.

The iron doors of a prisoner's cell are opened early in the morning and when the place is cleansed, the prisoner is handed two big, thin chapatis and something to eat them with. This done, the locks close their jaws again and the mud-walls staring at him through the iron bars darken the vision of the unfortunate man, shutting out from his view the horizon beyond.

It is a very dark and dreary life indeed for one who has really known nothing about crime. Crime has an energizing motive power behind it, and has never lacked in resourcelessness. The old criminal cheers up the new, saying: "Put up a bold face, my friend, and laugh and smile, since no hardship, no solitary confinement, no lock-and-key system of terror can cheat us of cheating, bully us out of bullying or trick us out of our trickery. Use your talents to your best advantage, and all will be well. You can malinger, abuse, whine, whimper, or wag your tail or bribe to the accompaniment of flattery. Don't you know that you are even capable, in your awful wretchedness, of secreting a deadly venom, the weapon of offence of the lowliest of the lowly?"

Prisons are supposed to reform their denizens, but in actual fact all that a convict does is to try all the time to cheat the laws that are meant to crush him out of shape, out of existence. His sole aim, in short, is to live out the period of his imprisonment. That is why he has recourse to smuggling and takes to intoxicating drugs, etc. The laws are brutal. They cannot suppress crime, though they are meant to supplant it. The sole occupation of a prisoner is to try to evade rules and restrictions, and avoid punishment.

Many prisoners continued to meet and talk with us. Enter the gates as a prisoner, and you become one of them ! I saw no criminals but men like you and me looking as anybody would look like under the same conditions. A prison is nothing but a replica of the outside world in miniature: the poverty and misery, the misrule and repression of the outside wider world is , presented here in a concentrated form.

I had become one of the prisoners, a recipient of their sad heritage. I was dropped in as a contradiction, as an anomaly, an unwanted thing, and the appellation of "terrorist" added to my name made the jail authorities take me as one. Ours was "a special case," requiring special attention by the officers. They had strictly forbidden us to mix with the ordinary criminals.

The prison rose before my eyes like a gigantic obstacle, a formidable citadel of counter-revolution, a giant machine to crush our spirit, and squeeze us dry of the blood which had been charged with revolutionary fervour. Its environment began to infiltrate into my veins like a mean, vulgar, intoxicating drug and made me stand on the offensive. Its object was to knead us into tractable material. We were ready to be put to the test.

We demanded to be put together. I had been able to see several more of my friends confined in other rows of cells. Only three days and three nights had passed and we already knew that without struggle one could not obtain *chapatis* that were not half-baked, verminless cooked vegetables, water, air and

sun, and the light of a seemingly blind hurricane lamp at night. In fact there were no rights for a prisoner unless he could fight for them. We went to the tap and a convict officer accompanied us. We put our heads out of our cells and had to contend with the warder. We were followed to the latrine, pursued to the bathing place, and harassed when we tried to talk with anyone in the jail, even a co-accused in the case. We felt this humiliating treatment ought to stop.

The first impression a political prisoner seems to make on the jail authorities is that he is a great nuisance to them, and that they might have nothing to bother about if they could keep him under lock and key in his cell for twenty-four hours on end, day in and day out, until the moment of his release. Once out of his cell, once any latitude is allowed to him, there may arise many a problem in regard to jail discipline. So the officers seem to think. Latitude breeds latitude, freedom breeds freedom, but complete prostration paralyses, sheer ignorance can find no argument, a total helplessness can raise no cry. The ideal atmosphere that the officers always long for is peace without problems. They have the powers to enforce it.

The most persistent demand all of us were making upon the authorities was to put us together in an 'association barrack.' The comrades who were not taken to the Fort during the police investigation had also arrived in jail. Our trying to meet one another in spite of the instructions to the contrary, had created an atmosphere of tension. We resisted the unnecessary and irksome restrictions imposed upon us, and the attitude of the authorities became stiffer. One of us Malik Kundan Lal of Lyallpur, retaliated when an officer ill-treated him. The situation was growing serious.

The Superintendent came to see us. It was my fifth day in prison. He called all of us together in his presence and harangued us thus : "Young men ! You are revolutionaries no longer, but prisoners bound to obey rules. You must know that the prison is a little kingdom and the Superintendent here has more powers than any absolute king can have. I can't

stand indiscipline amongst you. Behave properly and you will have facilities."

He looked at us with a benevolent smile upon his face. The man of authority was in a conciliatory mood. He made no mention of any alleged misbehaviour on our part, and asked us to be like law abiding citizens enjoying the rights of citizenship.

Our spokesmen requested him to put us all together. He agreed and we were taken to a common barrack the same evening.

CHAPTER X

IT LOOKED LIKE A FESTIVAL

WE were twenty-six in all. Dharam Vir, a jolly young comrade from Lyallpur, had been the first to be arrested in connection with our case. There was his opposite in character, Malik Kundan Lal, the fiery, impetuous, energetic youth who had been arrested for complicity in the Lyallpur bomb-outrage. Malik Nathu Ram, a veteran Congress worker of Rawalpindi, was there along with Krishan Lal, Krishan Gopal, Hari Ram Pahlwan, Baba Gurbux Singh, Harnam Singh, Sardar Singh, Bansi Lal, Maharaj Krishan, Sewa Ram and Bishan Das from the same city. None of these Rawalpindi comrades except Hari Ram Pahlwan and Krishan Gopal had been in the Fort. There were the three comrades, Harnam Singh, Bhim Sen and Gokul Chand hailing from Sheikhupura, one of the six places where bomb-explosions had occurred. The meeting with my old friend Bhag Ram, who had been arrested at Jammu about a fortnight before, was a pleasant surprise. He was kept in the Fort, but I did not know of his presence there. The police had brought him only a few hours earlier into jail. My brother Amrik Singh about whom I had heard several stories of defiance and courage before the police,was there to narrate his

experiences. Dharam Pal, younger brother of Yashpal, was arrested and sent to Jail on no other plausible ground than that he was the brother of a revolutionary. Bansi Lal of Lyallpur was another addition. Pandit Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal, L. Kundan Lal, Jai Parkash and Dianat Rai who were arrested at Lahore had come with us from the Fort and we had the opportunity to narrate experiences under police custody. The majority of the rest were these whom I met in jail for the first time. It was pleasant beyond measure to be huddled together in the same barrack, the floor of which was strewn all over with beddings and luggage. We had given up all reserve in the mad joy of coming together, and flitted from seat to seat, the bed-clothes trailing along behind us.

In our preoccupation we had not taken notice of a separate batch of under-trial prisoners occupying a corner of the same barrack. They were arrested in connection with what was known as the Zira Bomb Case, and were to be tried by the same Special Tribunal which was constituted for the purpose of our case. We made amends for the seeming neglect by paying added attention to these comrades.

The feeble light of the single incandescent lamp over our heads could not draw our attention to the fact that the night had come. We only remembered at about eleven o'clock that we had not yet had our food. We talked while we ate. The joy of our hearts gushed forth in waves, in jets, in strong flashes of light. Free, once and for all, from the insidious atmosphere of the Lahore Fort and other police stations, we felt firm ground beneath our feet from where we could boldly meet our fate. The time taken for the police investigation had been the period of incubation for a big conspiracy of falsehood and fabrication to hatch. They had many facts in their possession, intermixed with much of their own imaginings, and a hybrid creation was in existence for us to contend with. It was, however, a great relief to know where we stood. The burden of uncertainty was taken off our minds.

The frenzy of our jollity and fun went on unabated till long past midnight, and we hardly slept for even an hour.

In the morning our officer-in-charge came to unlock our barrack and told us to be ready at nine to go to the court. Let out, we surveyed our surroundings. It was an old hospital barrack, a little prison within the vast prison, completely cut off from the rest of the jail. We went back to inspect the place where Hari Ram Pahlwan had met with an accident in the darkness of the night. The warder on duty asked us to stop our merriment and make haste to get ready for the court. The lorries had come to the gate of the Borstal to take us to the Central Jail where the Special Tribunal was to hold its session. The Tribunal was appointed to try our case and deliver judgment, against which, it was originally intended, there should be no appeal. Later on, the right of appeal had to be conceded, as a result of the countrywide agitation against the wide powers given to the Special Tribunal.

The "big three" of the police were present there, along with several of their lieutenants. There had been feverish activity on their part for the past three months, and they were happy at its outcome. The future held for them promise of reward and promotion, the fruits of the labours which had given them a wide experience and knowledge about secret organisations. There was pride and satisfaction on the faces of the officers and hope in their hearts when they put up our Challans before the court.

We stood handcuffed inside the enclosures newly constructed for us. There were about a dozen police constables standing guard to our left. In the front were the seats in two rows for the counsel for the defence and the prosecution. The rostrum for the judges was to our right. Several high police officials were seated beside the counsel for the prosecution as if to buttress him. A high iron netting partitioned off the remaining space as a visitors' gallery.

Many lawyers from the city were present to give us advice, though we had yet to decide who should take charge of our defence.

The Public Prosecutor, Pandit Jawala Prashad, a dignified Kashmiri Brahmin, in his gracefully tied milk-white turban, the

conventional black coat and pyjamas, rose from his chair to open the case for the prosecution. He was a scholarly figure who spoke in a lion's voice the language of the most learned.

There sat the President of the Tribunal, Mr. H.A.C.. Blacker, a man of calm observation with nothing conspicuous about him. He had been looking unobtrusively but continuously towards us since the time we were produced in the court. The youngest of the judges, Mr. Sleem, a well-known lawyer from Lahore, sat to the left of the President. He looked smart and vivacious. There was a general restlessness about him, a trait common to men of extraordinary intellectual capacity. His smiling, self-confident attitude put in unfavourable contrast the bearing of the third and the oldest of the judges, Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram Soni. He was a retired Sessions Judge of about seventy with an austere face, gaunt and thin frame and a shaky head. Age had affected the poise of his head, but the moment you heard his loud and firm voice, the voice that could command attention and check unnecessary interference, you knew that he still was a man of unfailing energy.

We requested the judges to allow us certain facilities for defence, and to recommend better class treatment for us. Their reply was favourable. They rose for the day and we were sent back to the Borstal Jail.

We had not yet finished with the stories about the police treatment that each had to tell. The character and personality of the different officers, approvers, and arrested persons set free on the condition that they gave evidence came in for review, showing how the memories of the Fort and other police stations were still affecting us.

"How is it that Pandit Inderpal, the chief actor in the drama, happens to play the part he is doing?" was the question on everyone's lips.

"He took charge of our post-arrest activities and is still at the helm of the affairs. I feel he proposes to do nothing more than salvage work," said Pandit Rupchand, smiling confidently.

His enigmatic assertion was the occasion for a general analysis of Pandit Inderpal's character. Nobody had anything against him except the charge of desertion. The integrity of his past character caused us a lot of perplexity because of his recent change of front. Pandit Rupchand and I exchanged opinions, and I felt more convinced of the soundness of the views expressed by Sardar Partap Singh, D. S. P. in the Fort. The comrades who did not know Pandit Inderpal were naturally sceptical. We did not argue the matter with them.

Shiv Ram, approver, was described by the Rawalpindi comrades as a man who would go to any length to save his skin. Saran Das, his younger brother, was said to have turned an approver only because of the unremitting pressure brought to bear by Shiv Ram. We knew nothing about Khairati Ram except the stories of the frequent visits of his rich relatives in cars to the Fort. There was no question of any opinion about the fifth approver, Madan Gopal, whom none of us had ever seen.

The main features of the case for the prosecution could be gathered from the police statements of the approvers, copies of which were supplied to us. We had enough experience of the guiding force and the powerful influences behind these statements, but it in no way seemed to conflict with the natural optimism of some of us who believed that the case would be a total failure. Many well-meaning friends advised us to apply ourselves vigorously to the matter of our defence. Others were in favour of using the trial for the purposes of political propaganda. One or two were of the opinion that we should first see whether or not the judges conducted the trial in a fair spirit and then decide our line of action. Discussions continued without any conclusive result.

Meanwhile the stories about police maltreatment were pouring in from all sides. Everybody's experience was unique. Dharam Vir's ordeal was the longest and the most severe. He had met brute force by sheer extraordinary endurance. He was a strong, plump and jolly young man with the body of a wrestler and

could stand much physical suffering. Moreover he was the type of a person whose mental equilibrium could not be upset by any thing. We chafed him instead of sympathising with him. His fingers had been pressed with sticks between them, but nobody believed any torture could distort his features. He could give us no proof.

Sewa Ram had been arrested at Rawalpindi but was taken to an out-of-the-way police station of Golra, several miles away. The Sub-Inspector there thought he had struck a gold mine when the case of a political conspirator was placed in his hands. What a successful career he could foresee for himself if he could only succeed in breaking the will of this young man.

With this idea in his mind he lost no time in applying third degree methods. By and by he became impatient, and began to lose self-confidence. Despairing of the use of brute force, he one day ordered his subordinates to bring big ants, hundreds of which were inserted under Sewa Ram's shirt, which was then closely tied at both ends. Sewa Ram's hands were tied behind his back and his legs, too, were chained. He proved to be a man of extraordinary nerve. He stood even this horrible torment.

The Sub-Inspector, flying into a rage, caught both ends of Sewa Ram's moustaches in his fingers and asked the constables to open the mouth of the wretch so that he might spit into it. These orders were hardly out of the Sub-Inspector's lips when Sewa Ram, taking advantage of the latter's lowered face, hurled a lump of expectoration straight into his throat. The action was so instantaneous and unexpected that the Sub-Inspector automatically let go Sewa Ram's moustaches and was too mortified to think of any swift retaliatory measures. Later, he ordered Sewa Ram to be tied to his *charpai*, which was then made to stand head-dounwards beside a well. The unfortunate man remained in this position until he fainted. The Sub-Inspector, however, could not get a word out of him in spite of all the tortures he inflicted.

Some other Rawalpindi comrades who were taken to outlying police stations were similarly ill-treated. The officers in the Fort, however, used a more varied and much subtler technique. Physical torture alternated with expression of sympathy and compassion. Subtle insinuations were made against other comrades, thus sowing the seed of discord by breeding distrust. Efforts were made to set one comrade against another in order to get a reprieve. In case of some comrades this technique worked and they gave statements and became approvers or witnesses under Section 164. Then the pressure on others was relaxed, and those sent to various out-of-the-way police stations were brought back to Rawalpindi or Lahore, and placed under charge of officers more capable of securing their conviction.

We were again taken to the court in prisoners' vans, Malik Kundan Lal's thundering voice leading us in revolutionary slogans. Reaching our enclosure we sang a revolutionary song. The judges came and the court proceedings commenced.

The President informed us that the Government had sanctioned Rs. 128 per day for three defence counsel who were to defend all the twenty-six accused. The court adjourned to give us time to make our selection of these three lawyers.

CHAPTER XI

SIMPLE AND LOVING

COMING out of the court room, into the open courtyard, we stood waiting for the prison vans to take us back to the Borstal Jail. The Inspector in charge of the police guard marched us towards the front wall in which there was an iron gate on which he tapped again and again.

"Are we not going to the Borstal ?" asked one of us of the Inspector .

We were greatly intrigued at his enigmatic answer. "Yes, there is another path, a short one that will save much trouble."

We guessed they did not want to take us by the open road where people would gather and shout revolutionary slogans in response to ours from the prison-vans. The iron gate opened at last and, to our surprise, we found ourselves in the Central Jail. So we had changed "homes."

The chief warder of the Central Jail took charge of us, and after each one of us had been minutely searched we were led to No. 14 (Old), a ward where condemned prisoners were formerly kept. The place had a sinister appearance and the narrow compound looked gloomy even in broad daylight. It was only about four o'clock in the afternoon. We had entered through a small iron window and stood outside, waiting for our luggage to arrive from the Borstal Jail. It was a double row of cells like the vertebral column of a huge prehistoric animal, with its curved tail jutting into two other rows of cells on either side, leaving a narrow, irregular and open space to walk around.

Our luggage arrived at last. The officer in charge asked us to occupy the cells in such a way as to leave one cell vacant between the two occupied ones on either side. We walked around the place and had a look at the inside of the cells. We came back to our starting point, but, obviously, there was yet another row of cells we had failed to see, far from that row came the voices of men. We went round the place again and discovered the hidden row of cells, called "Badmash Line." Some prisoners with brooms in their hands were busy cleaning the cells under the supervision of a convict Lambardar, a terrible-looking, dark-skinned Baloch, aptly called "Afim" (Opium). There were more than fifty cells in all, whereas we were only twenty-six, but the authorities were not prepared to accommodate any other prisoners in our ward, and thus we were distributed all over the place and locked in.

Night descended earlier on these kutcha cells than in the rest of the jail, and no lights were provided. We called to one

another from our respective cells and raised revolutionary slogans. Next morning we were charged with acting against jail rules, because neither shouting nor talking aloud was allowed. In the evening we were supplied with hurricane lamps and were permitted to occupy the cells in any order we liked. We vacated the Badmash Line and came over to the row of cells nearer the gate. The newly built condemned cells, called Ward No. 15, where Sardar Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev were confined, were situated close to our ward. The condemned prisoners exchanged greetings after nightfall and talked aloud till about eleven. The rule imposing silence applied to all the prisoners in all jails but jail authorities were unable to enforce it against those in the condemned cells awaiting death. All of us were scrupulously silent when it was "talking time" for the condemned prisoners, for we hoped to catch the voices of the three patriots sentenced to death. Unluckily, we succeeded but rarely, because of the general uproar caused by all the occupants of that ward talking at the same time. Then came the inevitable silence, the eternal counterpart of man's noisy and feverish activity.

Many lawyers came to see us during the first five or six days. Everday we had interviews with about a dozen of them. They were business-like, polite and eager to defend us. Some were recommended by our friends and relatives. We could not decide whom to choose. It seemed difficult to arrive at a unanimous decision, partly because our choices differed, partly because some of us did not want to defend themselves at all. Legal squabbling, they argued, was a poor attitude of mind for revolutionaries bent upon an armed clash with the foreign oppressor : they spurned all legal protection with contempt. There was some point in what they said. The majority were in favour of letting the farce of a trial begin, leaving such questions as the boycott of the court, and refusal to offer any defence for future decision, according to circumstances as they might shape themselves. Even the Deputy Superintendent of the jail offered an opinion about a certain lawyer. We disregarded that opinion, but were later proved to be in the wrong.

One afternoon a middle-aged, simple-looking man dressed in khadi, with a Gandhi cap on his almost bald head, came to see us. There was a care-worn expression on his face as he took his seat on a small stool. We had no chairs and waited, with one leg thrown over the other, for all our comrádes to gather together. His feet were covered in old-fashioned black shoes, broad at the toe. There was neither a show of politeness nor cordiality from either side. A blanket was spread on the ground and we all sat down in a semi-circle around him.

He told us that he was Sham Lal, Advocate from Rohtak. He said he had been serving his sentence in Gujrat special jail, and still had about a month's more imprisonment to undergo, but his fellow *satyagrahi* prisoners insisted that he should get more remission and be released earlier in order to come to us and see whether he could be of any help.

Several Congress leaders confined at the time in Gujrat jail were known to some of us. We began to make enquiries about the conditions there, but L. Sham Lal's replies were short and curt. Nevertheless he informed us, still looking care worn, "The Congressmen there were greatly disappointed at the tragic turn of events in the case of Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Those fine youths have gone almost undefended. We were shocked to learn about the wholesale arrests in connection with your case. It is outrageous to see our young men sentenced to death without even the satisfaction of lawful defence".

"We can't pin our hopes on defence, which is not worthy of revolutionaries who are worth their salt," said someone.

Lalaji looked pained but said nothing in reply. He continued after a pause. "I gave up my practice in the non-co-operation days and took a vow not to resume the profession for the rest of my life, but I am ready to break my vow if you so desire."

There was an awkward pause, as none of us gave a reply.

Lalaji continued, "I am emphatically of the opinion that you should defend yourselves. There is no sense in boycotting the court. You should consult your relatives and friends and inform me if you decide to have my services."

That was all. We looked at one another while he was taking a casual view of the place. He looked again towards us in expectation of something we might say, but nobody spoke. We discussed nothing. All eyes were upon him. He was so simple, so disarmingly sincere. His homely features were lit up with this rugged sincerity which hardly needed any words to manifest itself.

All of a sudden, Malik Nathu Ram was heard to say, "We have full faith in you. We need not consult anyone else. You are the senior counsel, and on you lies the responsibility of choosing your juniors."

Laughter and smiles were the indication of our relief at coming to this definite decision.

Lala Sham Lal too smiled and said, "Revolutionaries suffer no division of opinion when it comes to taking a decision. I am glad you have decided to defend yourselves ; you would have to pay heed to the advice of an old man like me in the conduct of your defence, and not give way to emotions on momentous questions affecting your life. I am greatly satisfied at the confidence you have shown in me. Well, now I go. When I come next time I shall ask you about your studies, about books and other useful things you are interested in."

CHAPTER XII

TO BEGIN WITH

THE Public Prosecutor, portly of figure and fair of complexion, rose to address the court, his face beaming with self confidence. He began by tracing the origin of conspiracy cases, beginning with Shri Aurobindo Ghosh, the founder of the terrorist movement, passing on to the various old-time terrorists and their activities and dwelling upon the famous 1914-15 conspiracy to overthrow the British Raj where in he had served as junior counsel on the prosecution side. He grew eloquent over the pernicious influence of this conspiracy upon the Kakori Case, emphasising the activities of a dare-devil revolutionary, Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad, who had been declared absconder in the present case. Azad, he said, had played a conspicuous part in the case of S. Bhagat Singh and others, the main charge against whom was the murder of Mr. Saunders, a European Deputy Superintendent of Police. He was alleged to be one of those who shot him dead. He and four other absconders of the above-mentioned case, said Pandit Jwala Prashad, met together to reorganise their conspiratorial activities after the arrest of their associate conspirators; and the present conspiracy was the result. The activities of this latter group of dangerous criminals, he said, formed the basis of the present trial. He proposed to produce five approvers and about seven hundred prosecution witnesses of an independent character to prove their guilt.

He then made a brief reference to the individual activities of different accused persons brought to trial. He narrated the story of the partially successful attempt to blow up the Viceregal train near Delhi, and charged the absconders, Bhagwati Charan and Yashpal, with being the chief organisers of the plot. Herein came the reference to the part played by Pandit Inderpal, the shrewdest member of the party co-opted by the two revolutionary leaders.

The substance of what the Public Prosecutor related further was altogether new for us. That Inderpal lived in the guise of a Sadhu in Badarpur. He had taken his residence in a village near Delhi in order to help mature the bomb outrage plot. Party members visited him dressed as disciples and brought bombs, wires, implements and various other articles that were required. They worked with him at night. Yashpal, Bhag Ram and Hans Raj "Wireless" rendered active help in the execution of the plan. The bomb was placed underneath the railwayline: and exploded as the Viceregal train passed; there was fortunately no derailment, but only some damage to the train. Inderpal returned to Lahore. He had come away much dissatisfied with one of the leaders of the Party, namely Yashpal, a former friend of his, whom he had long been helping with funds. The experience gained by him while actively participating in important Party-work, had shaken his faith in his old friend. He began to think of organising an independent group which was to work more whole-heartedly and less self-sparingly. He gathered around him such enthusiastic youths as Gulab Singh, Hans Raj, Rupchand, Bhag Ram, Amrik Singh, and Jahangiri Lal and succeeded in organising them into a party called "Atshi-Chakkar." These young men met together at the *baithak* of Pandit Rupchand in Gowal Mandi, and their deliberations resulted in the emergence of a plan to perpetrate simultaneous bomb-outrages at six different places, On the 19th of June, 1930,the bombs exploded at the same time in six different cities, namely Lahore, Sheikhupura, Gujranwala, Amritsar, Lyallpur and Rawalpindi, resulting in loss of life and property. One police officer was killed at Gujranwala, another at Lyallpur and several were seriously injured. A bomb was deliberately made toexplode ineach of the houses rented for the purpose in these six places, in order to draw the attention of the police, and a second bomb exploded when the police went in to carry out investigations.Inderpal and Gulab Singh went to Rawalpindi and after making arrangements for the explosion there, came back to organise similar action at

Sheikhupura. Jahangiri Lal accompanied them to this place. Back from Sheikhupura Gulab Singh went to Gujranwala and took his brother Amrik Singh along with him. Next, he (Gulab Singh) went to Amritsar with L. Kundan Lal as his helper and came back to Lahore, leaving him to ignite the decoy bomb. Hans Raj "Wireless," Rupchand and Khairati Ram had meanwhile gone to Lyallpur to make similar arrangements there. Pandit Inderpal had to see to the explosion at Lahore, and was assisted in this action by Jai Parkash and Dianat Rai. In addition to this, the Party was responsible for various other dangerous schemes and actions. A bomb was thrown at a police party assembled to disperse foreign cloth picketers in the Raja Bazaar of Rawalpindi. Amrik Singh was involved in an accidental explosion which occurred in a confectioner's shop in Said Mitha Bazaar of Lahore when he had stopped with a suitcase containing explosive substance while on his way to Shahdara, where experiments were to be carried out. Another dangerous plan of the Party, designed to rescue Bhagat Singh and others being tried in this very place where the present court sat, was upset by the death of one of the main organisers of the Party, Bhagwati Charan. This, in brief, was the story of the crimes of the accused, and the prosecution would produce evidence to prove the truth of the charges against them.

The learned Public Prosecutor had traced the history of our "crimes" from the time when the majority of us were not even born. It was, however, gratifying to learn from him that we were successors to a line of great revolutionaries. It was my humble view then–and I still hold it–that we were responsible only for what we had done, and not for the past history of the revolutionary movement which had influenced our minds. The President of the Tribunal casually remarked that according to English law we could be held responsible for all the past actions of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army if we were proved to be its members. The law in India, however, was different, he said.

The opening speech of the Public Prosecutor had the force and charm of imagination. The story of our own activities

which he described from hearsay and not without poetic exaggeration, was as interesting to us as to any outsider, for much of it was not known to us. His eloquence made the adventures of our lives look more thrilling than they really were, for he garnished reality with happy invention. He called us fanatics and assassins and painted a gruesome picture of our revolutionary life. It was rather difficult for us to recognise ourselves in the portraits he drew of us.

Some preliminary evidence was recorded for a few days, and then came into the dock Pandit Inderpal, the most important of the prosecution witnesses. Dressed in a smart brown suit, he stood bareheaded before the judges, and had an air of indifference about him which all the gazing and staring on the part of the spectators could not shake. He cast a casual glance towards our enclosure and then averted his gaze. Pandit Rupchand and I, his intimate friends, looked keenly at him for a minute or two, and then automatically turned our faces.

"And now what?" asked Pandit Rupchand in an undertone.

"Everything has changed between us, hasn't it? This is another man," I whispered back.

"No! Look at his dress. It is his own old suit, and not a gift from the police."

I could not share the optimism of my comrade. The very fact that Pandit Inderpal had come directly from the enemy camp had naturally made his integrity doubtful. It was not so much a question of truth, of honesty, of avoiding falsehoods and exaggerations as of loyalty to his former comrades. I could not reconcile myself to the idea of his being the chief prosecution witness. At the same time I could understand his desire to save himself from the gallows. That was the fate sure to overtake him if he were to take the stand we had taken. By turning approver he could save his life. This was weakness, but we are all human beings. The question was, would he play completely into the hands of the police, parrot wise vomit whatever they wanted him to say, and implicate innocent people in order to save himself? Or would be limit himself strictly to the truth? Even an approver could be honest, I argued with myself. It was time for him to

decide. One way or the other. If he chose the side against us, he would have to decide to bow to the will of the police in spite of the truthfulness of his nature. Everyone of us who knew him intimately knew for certain, that there was no meanness about the man. I believed that he would speak nothing but the truth if he chose the safe side. The first phase of life was over: the second had began. Former loyalties and sentiments did not matter. It was the cold logic of circumstances asserting itself. I conceded him his right to choose life in preference to death if his nerves failed him, but I expected him to keep to the truth in his statements. That much I could stand. What I dreaded, what we all dreaded, was that he may so forswear himself, go so far beyond the facts, as to lose altogether the respect me held him in. Then his words would rankle in our hearts for ever.

"Is he still a comrade?" "What has happened to him under tne police custody?" "Is he still a whole, or is broken in part?" "Have his personal interests become so great, so pressing that he has forgotten our vow to live and die together for the common cause of our country's freedom?" This is how we ruminated and commented. Never when we had worked together, had the minutest difference arisen between us in relation to our ideology. We were one family, one instrument of our nation's will to freedom, one tuned to the song of revolution! We breathed happiness. And now this most unexpected of blows. We were not worried about our own fate. What worried us was the possibility of the spiritual demise of a comrade whom we had loved and respected and admired. But all speculation was now unnecessary, for we were face to face with him and would soon know his role.

Pandit Inderpal coughed a little and began his evidence in an indifferent, unconcerned way. He related the story of his life from his earliest childhood till he came to Lahore in search of employment. He mentioned Yashpal. He described the origin of the conspiracy and gave account of his part in the attempt to derail the Viceregal train.

All this was not said in a day. A week and a half had passed, and he was yet far from mentioning the part of any other accused present in court. He had the typical memory of a Brahmin and described every episode of his revolutionary career, leaving no details unmentioned. In an impressive statement, he told the court, what marvellous ingenuity, courage and resourcefulness he had shown while living as a Sadhu near Delhi. He came to wield great influence over the illiterate village folk, for whom he was a doctor, a palmist, a man of God, in short, everything. He told interesting anecdotes of his social life amongst peasants. He regained his former enthusiasm and jollity as the story progressed. He had an intelligent way of answering questions occasionally put by the court.

The C.I.D. officers looked jubilant. The Public Prosecutor regarded himself as the happiest and the luckiest man in the profession. He had by now accepted the situation for what it was. Our interest in this witness had flagged, we expected the worst and resigned ourselves to our lot.

Pandit Rupchand was still of the opinion that Pandit Inderpal could never be a tool of the police. I held, however, that the best attitude to adopt was to be prepared for the worst.

"I wish he could help us die together on the gallows, but that cannot be. He connot be one of us," remarked Pandit Rupchand, without a trace of anxiety in his tone.

"It would be a hard problem indeed for him to repudiate his past so completely as the police wanted him to, but he won't be able to save himself if he tries to save us too," I observed, wishing with all my heart that he would break the suspense by definitely taking the line of either an enemy or a friend.

We went again to the court next day. One of the C.I.D. men with long and crooked moustaches remarked, "We have little to bother, our single witness Inderpal will prove the case." Sardar Partap Singh, D.S.P., was also there. I remembered that his plan was to try only ten or twelve accused and finish the case in less than six months. Here, however, was more

than a month gone without any important evidence concluded. "Inderpal would take not less than six months," another officer was heard to say.

A day or two later, Pandit Inderpal astonished all those present in court by his denunciation of the police officers, whom he accused of tampering with the statements of the approvers and others, and of deliberately and maliciously throwing the burden of the actions committed by the absconders on the accused under trial.

There was great consternation amongst the members of the C.I.D. present in court. The Public Prosecutor winced at the remarks of the witness. Hastily throwing the papers in his hands on the table he inquired. "What do you mean by this?"

"I mean to relate only the true facts and nothing more," replied the witness calmly.

"Go on," exclaimed the Public Prosecutor sullenly.

So our assessment had come true. We had always known that Pandit Inderpal was a fearless man. We had believed him to be incapable of degrading himself to the depths of unprincipled selfishness. And there he was. Many of us would not have hated him much even if he had proved a tool in the hands of the police–such was his charm. It is very unusual for revolutionaries to be so indulgent towards an approver, but such was the case. We could not see the cards that he had held all along, and we were not at all surprised that he played them thus, everything was in character.

The witness told the court that there were three categories of revolutionaries in the Party, viz., full members in the know of plans, helpers who knew they were assisting in the Party work, only when assistance was asked of them without being taken into confidence, and the sympathisers who were not allowed to understand the significance of the help rendered by them.

The Public Prosecutor was not happy over this classification of terrorists and shook his head, but he was not in a position, especially at this stage of the case, to declare his chief

witness hostile. He refused to believe what was actually happening before his eyes and was a helpless spectator of the sifting of the truth from the falsehood piled up against us by the police. The witness stood resolute and unperturbed at the indignant looks of the police officers fidgeting in their chairs. The Public Prosecutor suffered him to go on with his evidence.

CHAPTER XIII
UNDER A NEW SKY

AT this stage, Sita Ram, a declared absconder in our case, was arrested and produced in the court. The whole of the evidence had to be repeated for him. Pandit Inderpal started from the beginning. None of us, except the newcomer, were interested in what was to be said in the court during the next fortnight.

It was evident that Pandit Inderpal would take more than six months to conclude his evidence, and if each of the remaining approvers also took a month or so, we could safely expect a year to pass. There were seven hundred and odd prosecution witnesses who might land us in the third or even the fourth year of trial before the final judgment came. Our interest in the case naturally dwindled. The majority of us gave up attending the court on the excuse of illness, and were represented in our absence by our counsel. There was a legal-minded group headed by Jahangiri Lal. It consisted of his two brothers, L. Kundan Lal and Jai Parkash, their relative, Bhim Sen, Krishan Gopal of Rawalpindi and one or two others. They regularly went to the court and assisted L. Sham Lal and his Juniors in our defence. The rest had to appear whenever an identificationparadefor them was held. Were it possible to be identified by proxy, they would have accepted the procedure and willingly suffered the consequences, but the law was too conventional to be so obliging.

We wanted to utilise the long period at our disposal in pursuit of studies. The junior defence counsels were displeased at our lack of interest in the proceedings of the court, but we pleaded ignorance of law and its intricacies. L. Sham Lal, on the other hand, encouraged us by supplying us books, Journals periodicals, etc., He arranged for us a free membership of the Public Library, which meant forty excellent books a month for us to read. A daily newspaper was a luxury totally prohibited in Jail, but we were allowed to read the local Urdu Daily, the Milap in the court. Some of us attended the court only to read it. We came back to the jail within half an hour or so. The kindly and indulgent L. Sham Lal smiled upon us. Each one of us went at least once a week to the court just to have an opportunity of talking with him on matters other than our defence. He, too, would not forget to pay us an occasional visit inside jail in spite of other pressing work.

Ward No. 14 lost its gloomy aspect and resounded with cheerful sounds all day long. We had, so to say, settled in the jail, though the conditions under which we lived were far from satisfactory. Whatever difficulty we tried to solve brought us into conflict with the jail authorities. The light of hurricane lamp was insufficient for reading at night. The books we obtained from outside were disallowed by the censoring authority on the flimsiest grounds. One with a red cover, for example, could never be allowed. A title suggestion of a political theme made the book the most suspicious in the eyes of the officers. Writing material was tabooed. We had to argue, to quarrel over the most common necessities of a decent life, because the officers were neither accustomed to requests of an unusual type such as ours nor to yielding without opposition. The vegetables supplied to us were overripe, the flour never free of sand and grit. The common salt contained the exerete of rats. Our segregation from the rest of the jail population was a serious concern for the authorities. We invariably made a bad impression whenever we complained to them against corruption or against the treatment meted out to "C" class

prisoners. The path from our ward to the court was guarded by convict officers whenever we passed, and any prisoner trying to talk or even to make a sign to us was punished there and then or hauled up before the Superintendent. We could see no difference between jail authorities and the police, and suspected them to be in league with each other. The Superintendent, Major Briggs, never tried to understand our viewpoint. There was for him no reasonable or genuine complaint in our ward. Every demand, howsoever legitimate, was regarded as mischief created by hardened and rebellious criminals. He seldom agreed to allow us any facility but did not object to it if his Deputy did so. Experience told us that he would consider our requests only if we made them through his Deputy, and not directly to him. We took our complaints into the court on several occasions, and the judges, whenever they considered the matter fit for intervention called for the Superintendent. Our conditions began to show a little improvement. It depended upon their mood whether a conflict with those who carried out the law would take an amicable or a difficult turn. Imagine the extent of the constraint upon a man, who could not even keep a needle or a piece of thread without their permission Such a dependence for the necessities of life, big or small, implied a relationship of the most abject slavery ever forced upon man. It was but natural that a prisoner's life was a continuous defiance of restraints and restrictions imposed by rules and regulations, and that his struggle was the only relief he had from the feeling of suffocation which the atmosphere created.

The interviews allowed to us with our relatives were never an unmixed pleasure, because of the humiliating restrictions imposed upon them. My brothers had met me during my later days in the Fort, but the Police officer presiding at the interview had strictly warned us not to talk any thing else except to inquire about each other's health. I could not tell them even about the articles of clothing, bedding, etc. that I required. The police imposed such restrictions because they wanted to hide the actual conditions in the Fort from outsiders, but the jail authorities had nothing to hide from

our relatives. Why, then, were they so exacting and strict about interviews?

The officer-in-charge, in his official capacity, is an abnormal being. He watches, notes, and observes the minutest of things connected with us. He sits through the interviews even in the presence of ladies. He reads the letters we send or receive, censors everything that passes the jail gate and comes to our ward. He knows of our poverty, the economic condition of our relatives. However much we may resent this intrusion into our domestic life, there is no help from it. He is on duty as a cynic, a spy, an indecent meddler with the private affairs of others, and he can't be expected to be sympathetic, or to see goodness or greatness anywhere. He is the most eloquent symbol of the callousness of bureaucracy. A prisoner has to fight at every step for his self-respect, honour, decency. He can never expect a fair deal.

Sukhdev Raj, another absconder in our case, was arrested after about three and a half months of our trial in the court. His case was separated from ours for reasons of economy of time so that the evidence may not have to be presented de novo a third time for his benefit. The Tribunal had by this time delivered judgment in the Zira Bomb Case. The sentences did not exceed three years for any of the accused. Sukhdev Raj's case was taken up for hearing once or twice a week after lunch time. He was kept separate from us, but the jail authorities had to allow him to see us two or three times a week. He was an M. A. student from Lahore and was alleged to have been in the company of Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad, who had recently died in a desperate fight with the police in a garden at Allahbad. Sukhdev Raj was said to have escaped unhurt under cover of continuous fire from both sides.

He was an asset to our little community. His taste and choice of books were excellent. He had versatile interests, and had wit and wisdom. He was a slow and deliberate reader and an enthusiastic admirer of Bernard Shaw. Psychology was his favourite subject in addition to literature. His interest in astronomy was often the cause of conflict with the

jail warders at lock-up time. His coming to see us more often than could be permitted was another source of trouble with the officers. Nothing could curb his free spirit. It was a pleasure to read together with him: the result was a hectic effort at an all-round progress. Some tried language, others political literature, Sukhdev Raj, Pandit Rupchand and I read together the books considered difficult. He whetted our appetite for knowledge.

Our enthusiasm for studies did not make us neglect our health in any manner. Dharam Vir, the protagonist of physical culture, daily practised five hundred *baithaks* and as many *dands*. His exercise continued for more than two hours of the early morning and was finished before anyone else was awake. This was his daily routine. He exhorted others also to follow his example. He organised an *Akhada* and gave wrestling lessons to the few who were amenable to his influence. Others made him the butt of their jokes. He was more than a match for the fun of all others combined. He never felt the need for mental exercise. He rarely paid heed to books. Playful blows were showered upon him from all sides in response to his jokes that never irritated. Easy and overflowing, his vivacity knew no bounds. Book-worms like Pandit Rupchand were his special target.

Mahatma Gandhi's *Arogya Sadhan* long remained a popular book with some of us. Malik Nathu Ram, the veteran Congress worker, became an exponent of the efficacy of saltless diet. Three or four of us, including myself, resorted to the system of one meal a day, and continued the practise for more than a year.

There was little room in our ward for outdoor games such as volley-ball or badminton. We had, however, a number of champions in indoor games such as *chaupar* and cards. Coming out of our cells after four or five hours' continuous reading, we would join noisily the group of players and feel refreshed.

Bhag Ram had organised a gossip-club. He propagated the view that sundry benefits accrued to man from pleasant chats. this advocate of chattiness had all the qualties of a good talker. Fine words fell from his mouth in perfect array. He would

translate his gossip into action, by suddenly appearing in the garb of a *Hato* (Kashmiri Labourer) to amuse us with the patois of those people. There was a great variety of extempore farces in his mental bag, and he had a method of his own for executing them. He would place himself in an unenvious position for questions to which he provided well-befitting answers in the 'Hato' language.

Amrik Singh gathered around him the convict workers in our kitchen, and the sweeper, and his organization gradually blossomed into a song-party propagating the name of the famous pastoral poet of "Hir Ranjha".

There developed amongst us, with the lapse of time, a Gharshna Party, its foremost advocate being Pandit Rupchand who grew into a veritable enemy of towels. He and a few others would go on bathing for hours, rubbing their bodies all the while. A towel could hardly withstand this unprecedented form of violonce for more than a couple of months. We saw many a victim wear away and then vanish altogether from the plane of existence.

Bhim Sen, who as a matter of policy belonged to the group bent on fighting the case, had his emotional sympathies elsewhere. He was on intimate terms with those who kept big stocks of cigarettes and *bidis*. He would share his own stock with them till their's dwindled to a few cigarettes. He would then switch over his sympathies to the party having ample stocks. His interests were multiple and far-reaching. A *tandur* (oven) was, for example, installed in a corner of our ward, mainly at his instance, and he himself took pains to train a *tanduria* who in due time began to make excellent *chapatis*. Whenever he found anyone alone and morose, Comrade Bhim Sen would go straight to him, and coax him into genial conversation, and no protestations against such an instrusion would be of any avail. This young man was a friend of all and enemy of none.

We observed the festivals like the world at large, and these were celebrated with much enthusiasm. Comrade Krishan Lal who

knew the culinary art of conjuring delicious dishes out of simple, ordinary things, had an exceptional talent for organising feasts and managing tea-parties, etc. The way he decorated and furnished rooms, and his arrangement and sense of proportion spoke of a highly cultivated aesthetic sense.

Sewa Ram was another remarkable personality, cool-headed and care-free, and reserved towards none. He would sing in a woman's voice and execute various tunes on the instrument of his throat. He knew how to dance. A *Jaltarang* was improvised by him out of tea-cups. His burst into a song early in the morning while he was still in bed, wrapped up in his quilt, was a delectable experience enjoyed by the early risers only. He was a goldsmith, a blacksmith, a tool-maker, a mechanic, and an artist besides being a genial soul. His hands worked with the capacity of a precision tool at making fountain pens, nibs, small articles for adornment and other uses, and this hobby he found difficult to give up even in jail. He made his own tools out of any scrap of iron he could lay hands on, and began some kind of productive labour. This habit of his was anathema to the jail officers, who carried out more searches of our ward than was customary.

Hari Ram Pahlwan would rise early and raise his voice in attempting to sing a song till it rose to the majesty of thunder. It was a pleasant awakening, his melodious song heralding the dawn.

Malik Nathu Ram was a man of affectionate nature. He had also tenacity of purpose and energy, and was a great social figure. He shone at "Public functions," held in our ward because of his great aptitude for "public service." His little sacrifices for the general good enhanced the effect of his magnetic personality. He was past his prime and could take little part in the boisterous activity of the young, yet he always seemed to be flushed with the joy of living. His nature was that of a born optimist; a man of faith and friendship. For some time he practised mesmerism with the object of developing mental concentration. I joined him in this for a short period.

Thus this group of men, though wedded to the same cause, yet displayed diversity of temper. Our ideosyncracies made us display our individualities inspite of the common purpose that we had together. The urge for individual expression in this hedged in and restricted world was strong. We had all, somewhere in us, the feeling that a new pattern of life would emerge for us in future. Some had death in view, others long sentences in jail, and the rest thefreedom that their acquittal would give them. We tried our best to establish contact with the class prisoners living in the barracks beside our ward. No enforced seclusion could deter us from taking interest in the jail population. We were ready to help them in their struggles, difficulties and needs whenever we got the chance.

Agreeable companionship, in short, had made our life as pleasant as possible. We were becoming more and more interested in "company" so that our concern in our defence began to recede into the background. The indifferernt ones were accustomed torreading the good or evil nature of the day's procceedings in court in the faces of those who formed the legal group, when they came back in the evening. The latter were, however, by no means the reticent sort needing persuasion or persistent requests in order to pour forth their impressions. Jahangiri Lal would come in, beaming with satisfaction and exclaiming loudly in case some lucky turns of events had occurred that day. "All shall be acquitted, Lala Kundan Lal, his elder brother, will announce with due gravity and solemnity of mien that the prosecution case had suffered such and such a devastating blow at the hands of such and such a witness, but he could hardly arouse enthusiasm in the minds of the confirmed "Unbelievers." The very next day one of these enthusiasts would change the tune and, on the basis of expert conclusions from the evidence so far produced in court, announce who was to get ten years, who eight, who four and so on. Jahangiri Lal, a keen observer of human nature, was too conscious of the likely effect of such hazardous remarks to forecast more than two years' rigorous imprisonment for Hari Ram Pahlwan. The Pahlwan would be content just

to frown at the mention of three years, but woe to the man who predicted any more. He would lunge forth with his fist raised for action. Bansi Lal of Rawalpindi, with his ever-itching tongue, would have his ears pulled by Hari Ram for pronouncing long sentences against him, but he would not mind even blows from Pahlwanji because of the pleasure he got from his joke. Such a reception did not detract the interest of the witticism because of Pahlwan's vigilance against bantering tongues. Bansi Lal was like an ever-singing lark and could not check his humour even when matters looked gloomy and dismal. He and Dharam Vir would keep on laughing under the rain of fisticuffs and blows on their backs. One was thin like a reed, the other fat, but their spirits were identical. They would never miss a chance of making merry at the expense of the legal group. The legalists retaliated by predicting fourteen years for each of them. It was charitable of these legal luminaries to go no further than fourteen years. They never talked of death sentences, because they were in reality more sympathetic and considerate than legal minded. A flaw in their judgment, often pointed out by the loose-tongued Bansi Lal and Dharam Vir, was that they spoke of nothing but honourable acquittal for those who had their favour, whereas they thought in terms of "extraordinary doses" for those who had fallen out of their favour. Persisting in an easy attitude even under heavy odds is, however, deserving of reward, and one of the legal luminaries, Jahangiri Lal, had the title of "High Court" conferred on him with due ceremony one day, under the splendour of a weather-beaten flag, consisting of a rag that the breeze had blown upon the electric pole in front of his cell. An illiterate Purbia prisoner working in our kitchen transformed the august name of "High Court" into simple "Hari Kot" (green coat), little knowing that simplicity and grandeur do not go side by side. The dignity of the title, nevertheless, remained unimpaired even in the years to come.

CHAPTER XIV

THE THREE SURETIES

THE three comrades in the condemned cells lay waiting for death. From the four corners of the country rose a roar in favour of commutation of their sentence. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and all the outstanding leaders of India bestirred themselves to save the lives of these patriots. The dumb millions of our country gathered together in masses in cities, towns, villages, and urged upon the Government to stop their execution. There was no organisation that did not put in an appeal in favour of these young men. Men of all creeds, all persuasions, classes, professions, sects, joined to urge that their lives be spared. Sympathy for them was voiced even in foreign countries. Innumerable appeals daily poured in from every part of our sub-continent. Had there been a popular government in India, it would have inevitably bowed to the will of the millions. Our alien masters were not moved at all.

There was still hope in the heart of the masses. We in prison knew from the increase of police and military guards within the four walls of the Central Jail that the hope was a false one. There were increasing signs that the execution was only a matter of few days.

A plum tree stood outside the gate of the condemned cells underneath which we daily stood before going to the court. This is where we were searched before we were taken to the court or brought back. The place made us highly conscious of the proximity of our three condemned patriots. Our eyes would search in vain for them in the cells, because even the outer doors were shut at the time of our coming and going. All of us had begun attending the court these days, and some came back earlier than usual with the object of having a glimpse of one of our condemned comrades, knowing that they were in turn let out into the open courtyard for a short time in the day. Even this meagre contact was to be had very rarely. Any day, any hour might bring them the signal to offer their youthful lives at the altar of freedom.

One of the prisoners who had to go, in the course of his duties, into both the wards sometimes acted as a messenger. One day we sent a message to Sardar Bhagat Singh, expressing a faint hope that the expectations of our countrymen might prove true and that they might be saved. He sent back in reply a couplet of Iqbal written on a bit of paper in Urdu.

کوئی دم کا مہمان ہوں اے اہل وطن + چراغ سحر ہوں بجھا چاہتا ہوں

"A few moments more and I go out like the wick of the lamp in the morning !"

No false hopes, no weakening of the resolve to die with a smile a steeled heart, a courageous mind, audacious thinking, no illusions, no wavering, no flickering like the wick of the lamp, but a continuous flame emitting abundant heat and light till the last extinghishing blow that was what I read from the lines of the poet scribbled on a bit of paper by S. Bhagat Singh.

What a tragedy it was that none of us living so near could be allowed to see these young men and know their last thoughts, their ideas, views, feelings, reconsidered in the light of their impending death and the terrible experiences they had had ! An unthinking machine was to crush them to death unfeelingly, unthinking. They were allowed no human contact with the outside world during all this period when they waited for death.

The execution took place in the evening of the 23rd March 1931, just before sunset. Executions always take place in the morning. This time-honoured practice was set aside in the case of these young men. All the prisoners in the jail, including us, were locked inside in the afternoon. A top-most officer was visiting the jail, we were told. It struck us that the officer or officers might be coming to inspect the condemned cells. We listened. No sound came from Ward No. 15. Not a soul moved in the jail. Such an unusual silence was portentous. The invisible god of death was stalking the place.

The whole of the population breathed uneasiness, suspicion, curiosity ! The warders stood silently outside the locked barracks and cells. The officers of the jail, one by one, came and went round the places under their charge. An hour and a half

passed, and then we heard the voice of Sardar Bhagat Singh informing his two companions : "They have come.!"

The three shouted thrice, "Long Live Revolution !" and we echoed them.

Not more than five minutes passed and they were on the gallows. We only heard the crashing sound of the falling plank.

Several high-ranking officials had attended the execution. The dead bodies were not taken out through the main gate, but through that of the smithy adjoining the building where the Special Tribunal trying us was holding its sessions. They were not handed over to the relatives or friends of the martyrs but taken in lorries to the bank of the Sutlej, were only half-cremated there and thrown into the river.

All these facts relating to the treatment meted out to them after death we learnt from the next day's papers. Hearing the thud of the plank, we in our mad fury began to shout revolutionary slogans and shake the barred doors of our cells. The people living in the bungalows across the jail road guessed from the noise inside the jail what had happened, and a pursuit party was organised to follow in cars the lorries which were taking the dead bodies away. They found some charred and mutilated remains of the martyrs on the bank of Sutlej.

Every jail employee who met us paid a glowing tribute to the courage of the three Patriots in the moment of their execution. There was none but had admiration, sympathy and a word of praise. Most of the prisoners fasted, others prayed for the souls of the martyrs. Not a soul seemed to be unaffected by the tragedy. Many a warder actually wept while relating the tales of their prison life. Some had been on duty in the condemned cells, others had been in charge while they were under-trial prisoners. They depicted the feelings of the common man. Their sympathies, genuine no doubt, were typical of Indian character. The whole nation was stirred to the very depth of its being. The same helpless grief, the same burning indignation, was felt all over the land.

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CHAPTER XV

A HEROIC DEATH AND BEGINNING OF A LEGAL MURDER

PANDIT INDERPAL made sensational allegations in the court against the investigating C. I. D. officers, given various instances of tampering with evidential documents, of falsification of original police reports and even of actual forgery. He charged the Magistrates visiting the Fort during the investigations with acquiescence in frequent changes made from time to time in the original statements given before them by the approvers and other witnesses. The reason why the police did all this in his presence was that he was believed to be totally in league with the police. It was characteristic of Inderpal to keep up a nonchalant and independent character as witness throughout the lengthy period of his evidence. The story that he related differed greatly from what the police had required him to parrot before the judges; but the prosecution did not lose heart. They had the bulk of evidence to produce against us yet and they were confident of buttressing the structure they had raised in spite of the shocks it had received from Inderpal.

Inderpal still seemed sentimentally attached to his deceased comrade and leader, Pandit Bhagwati Charan, who was the originator of the plan to rescue S. Bhagat Singh and his companions. The plan would have been carried out but for the unexpected death of Bhagwati Charan. Originally it was intended to rescue S. Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt only. A house at Bahawalpur Road was rented and party-men set to work there. A new type of bomb was ready and Pandit Bhagwati Charan one evening set out in the company of Sukh Dev Raj and Vaishampayan, to carry out a test. The party reached the jungle near Ravi, a place very safe for the purpose. Pandit Bhagwati Charan took out the bomb and was about to throw it when it suddenly burst in his hand because of the weakness of the trigger. A splinter struck Sukh Dev Raj in the foot. The terrific noise of the explosion had rung throughout the jungle and the outlying fields. Pandit Bhagwati Charan, sup-

porting his badly torn stomach with his hand, told his comrades to depart. He was mortally wounded. It was useless to remain there as the police, in his opinion, were sure to arrive at the scene of the explosion. Darkness would set in within less than an hour. His companions tried to stem the flow of his blood, but in vain.

"I as your leader order you to go away," cried the wounded revolutionary. Taking out his pistol from his pocket, he added, "I am yet alive and I know how to defend myself; you need have no fears about me."

It was impossible for his companions to leave him to die alone in the wilderness They would rather have died by his side. He was in the full possession of his reason and calmly argued with them against their vain sentimentalism. The injured foot of Sukh Dev Raj was swelling rapidly and in a few minutes it would not have been possible for him to walk even a few steps further. Pandit Bhagwati Charan persuaded him to go. He had, moreover, to arrange for a first-aid party. They took Pandit Bhagwati Charan into the jungle, and laying his head on an earthen mound as his pillow, Vaishampayan ran to the river and brought water in his hat. The Pandit sipped the water, and asked them to go, assuring them that he was able to pull through the night. Sukh Dev Raj departed for the city while Vaishampayan remained. The latter, too, had to make for the city, doubting whether Sukh Dev Raj could reach the place in time to bring a doctor. The condition of the Pandit was steadily getting worse!

"Carry on the work of the Party with double vigour if I die. Do not let the rescue plan suffer because of me."

These words, full of warmth and patriotic passion, rang again and again in the ears of Vaishampayan as he was running fast towards the city.

He knew what the life of Pandit Bhagwati Charan meant to the cause of the revolution and wanted to save him at all costs. He reached the Gowal Mandi *baithak* and asked Pandit Inderpal

to organise a first-aid party as soon as possible. Pandit Rupchand, L. Kundan Lal and I were told to buy cotton wool, bandages, etc., and come with a *charpai* to the riverside. Pandit Inderpal and Shiv went forward on bicycles. Shiv wanted to show Pandit Inderpal the place where the wounded comrade lay and then return to the city to arrange a doctor to attend to the wounds. It was entirely dark when Pandit Inderpal met us on the way. He led us through jungle on the hardly passable path. We were nowhere nearer our destination when the electric torch failed. Our search for the wounded comrade continued all through the night, but he could not be located. The second party sent by Sukh Dev Raj reached the jungle early in the morning. Pandit Bhagwati Charan had meanwhile died. A temporary grave was dug on the outskirts of the jungle and the revolutionaries could not help shedding tears while laying the mortal remains of the most valiant of their comrades under the earth. There was little hope of returning again to provide a better place for him.

Pandit Inderpal's narration of this story was not a matter-of-fact narrative, a mere repetition of evidential matter, but a feelingful and spirited account of the death of a hero, a tribute to the memory of a martyr whose sacrifice was not known even to all the members of the Party. The public knew of his death only from this statement of Pandit Inderpal in court. He had been a well-known figure in the political circles of Lahore before he joined the Party. His wife, Mrs. Durga Bhagwati Charan, was also a declared absconder in our case.

Pandit Inderpal, in the course of his statement, further declared how the dead body of comrade Bhagwati Charan was later on exhumed by the police and the earth sifted for his bones to be produced as exhibits in court.

The evidence of Pandit Inderpal was in its concluding stage when comrade Bhag Ram fell ill. He had been liable to hysterical fits since his early youth, and as Inderpal had stated in the court, it was owing to this trouble that the proposal for engaging him as the driver of the car which was to take the rescue party to the Central Jail was dropped. A fit coming upon him

under extraordinarily dangerous circumstances might have jeopardised the whole plan. He had a few mild attacks since the day of his arrest but now they grew more frequent and lasted longer. Each fit would leave him too weak to move from his bed for a day or two, after which he would try to regain the vivacity of spirit natural to him. With every new fit he lost more and more strength, so that his conscious efforts at cheerfulness grew feebler. After some time there was no energy left in him to enable him to capture one of his boisterous moods. He had an independent nature that drove him from place to place without allowing him to live and work anywhere at the cost of his self-respect. He had tried many a trade and learnt many a useful job. In his journeys from place to place he had come to understand the people of his country and the conditions under which they lived. He had listened to the call of our country in chains, and had, as the result of a desperate bid to bring her freedom, lost his own. Though of an indulgent and amiable disposition, he could not submit to humiliating conditions of existence. Chandar Shekhar Azad would often remark that "jail was a place where man had to suffer the worst indignities possible, and so, far better was it for a revolutionary to die fighting rather than to be arrested and sent to prison." Bhag Ram was smarting under the pain of the yoke newly saddled upon him. The stupid and inhuman restrictions over his liberty were sorely trying to him in his feeble state of health.

I had known him as a tireless worker before he was arrested. He was the type that lost themselves completely in their work. He would smoke half a dozen packets of cigarettes and work for hours, even days, in a corner of a Party house, unmindful of all necessities of life. In jail the work and the cigarettes were replaced by a feeling of helpless dependence upon the prison authorities, upon his friends and relatives outside. The crowning misfortune was the attitude of the Superintendent, who was also the medical officer of the jail. He regarded Bhag Ram as a malingerer and not a genuine case of hysteria. It was in his opinion only a "butter-and-milk-and-eggs" case. He would enquire without taking interest in the illness of Bhag Ram: "What

do you require? Fruits? Meat? More butter? Bhag Ram was cut to the quick at these insinuations. Fits became more frequent and of greater intensity. We who attended to him at such moments knew what a severe shaking every fit meant, but the Superintendent would believe neither Bhag Ram nor us. He would shake his head and say, "O no! It is nothing!"

Malingering is not unusual in prison, but it is the duty of the medical officer to find out the truth in every case. The generally unsympathetic attitude of the Superintendent towards the "dangerous" class of prisoners to which we belonged stood in way of his closely observing Bhag Ram's condition. He regarded us as anti-Government, anti-British maniacs who were impervious to all reason, and this bias so warped his judgment that he could not be objective, nor recognise the facts that stared him in the face. He always showed a disinclination to talk with any of us on his parade day, though his attitude towards ordinary prisoners was different. He was, to be fair to him, not as stiff-necked an official as he appeared to be, but because of his prejudices against the politicals he did give this impression.

Bhag Ram's health deteriorated and he was taken from our ward to a room in the jail hospital, where none of us could see him nor could we show any resentment at the indifferent treatment of the medical authorities regarding his illness. What was the purpose of sending him to the hospital except segregation, when the Superintendent said he was only faking illness? Bhag Ram found that the attitude of the medical staff had undergone a change for the worse. As a protest he refused to be represented by his counsel in his absence and informed the court accordingly. The court remained closed for two or three days and then the jail authorities began to carry him there on a stretcher. His bed was placed beside our enclosure. He would lie on it, sometimes conscious, sometimes in a state of coma under a fit, while the proceedings of the court went on. He informed the judges that he was not in a fit state of health to pay attention to what was going on in the court. The Superintendent of the jail was called to acquaint the court with the condition of his health and he testified to the "fact" that there was nothing wrong with him.

The judges, however, knew that a single court-day without business involved the expenditure of more than a thousand rupees by the Government, and that the persistence of the Superintendent, rightly or wrongly, in his medical opinion was sure to result in the obstruction of normal court proceedings, so they put pressure on our counsel, Lala Sham Lal, to presuade the accused to agree to being represented in *absentia*. Lalaji had a talk with us. He then submitted on our behalf that the judges could well see–and so could any lay man, for that matter-that the accused was not in a fit state of health to understand fully the significance of the evidence being recorded by the court, and to give instructions regarding that to the counsel for the defence. He impressed upon the court the seriousness with which we viewed the case of our ailing comrade. We wished the court proceedings to go on uninterrupted, but there was no other course for us than to join Bhag Ram in his protest if the medical authorities persisted in their callous attitude. The court expressed their inability to interfere in the matter concerning the opinion of the medical authority, and again asked Lala Sham Lal to use his persuasion with us. They told him that the only alternative for the Government would be to pass an Ordinance dispensing with the presence of the accused in person at the trial. We said we were prepared to withdraw our representation and let the court carry on the one-sided farce if that was why they chose to act.

The judges had, on our request, themselves seen the condition of Bhag Ram, who had by now lost his power to move his limbs. They could see that he was in an extremely weak state of health. They had previously seen him succumb to hysterical fits. They found it hard to disregard his statement that he was not in a fit state of mind to pay attention to evidence. The court was adjourned to give time to Lala Sham Lal to find some way out of the difficulty.

We put forth two demands, first, that our sick comrade be properly treated ; and second, that he should be medically examined by a *vaid* or a doctor not in Government service. The

judges conceded the second demand and promised to see what they could do to ensure proper medical aid for Bhag Ram. The deadlock was thus resolved by the reasonable attitude of both parties.

Within a few days Pandit Thakur Dutt Multani, a renowned *vaid* of Lahore, was called to the court to examine Bhag Ram and report on his condition. After a careful examination he testified that Bhag Ram might not be able, in his present state of extreme weakness, to apply his mind to the proceedings of the court even when he was not under the influence of a hysterical fit.

Bhag Ram had already withdrawn his objection, so the court went on recording evidence for some days more, after which they adjourned for the summer recess.

We had tried all legal methods of protest and pressure to secure redress of the grievance regarding our ailing comrade's medical treatment. Such was the power of bureaucracy that all our efforts came to nothing. His condition grew worse, and though none of us was allowed to visit him in the hospital, we knew that he had become well-nigh a paralytic. He managed to send us word that he was thinking of resorting to hunger-strike. We called a meeting and, after a brief consultation declared a hunger-strike from next day on, demanding Bhag Ram's return to our ward, better treatment of sick persons and redress of other grievances relating to the treatment in general by the jail authorities.

Lala Sham Lal intervened, and the officiating Superintendent accepted our demands after we had been on hunger-strike for twelve days. Lalaji was himself present at the time of our breaking the fast. Bhag Ram was brought back to us a skeleton. He had lost all power of movement except the involuntary movements of shivering and trembling. Death glared out of his eyes. In his extremity he looked like a stranger. We still hoped that he might be saved, but it was a vain hope, indeed. We were none the less happy that he had come back to us. He, too, could not but be happy. We flocked around him and felt

an indescribable satisfaction on seeing him sip slowly, out of a cup, the fruit juice provided to break his fast. Lala Sham Lal then told him that the officiating Superintendent had promised to treat him sympathetically. He had also agreed to give us some facilities. Thus we would be allowed to walk in the jail garden for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. The humiliating conditions laid down regarding our interviews were to be removed as far as possible. Lalaji bad us to be happy and appealed to us to let him successfully fight out the case for us. He then took leave of us. He was perhaps the happiest of all at the conclusion of this unwanted struggle.

After some days the Superintendent came back from leave and the officiating Superintendent had to go. The Superintendent had to honour the commitments made by his predecessor. He consented to secure the services of a dentist for some of us whose teeth required treatment. One day we were informed that the dentist had arrived and that we should, one by one, go to the Superintendent's office for treatment. I happened to be the first to go.

A well-built European of ample proportions and a bloated face sat beside the Superintendent's chair. His small mischievous eyes scrutinised me closely. There was something sinister about that look. He obviously knew that I was a terrorist. His flushed cheeks and his puffed face and Conspicuously swollen black eye-pits bespoke of a heavy drinker. He stood up, glared at me malevolently and ordered me to open my mouth. I complied, giving him an opportunity to have a good look before he could give advice. He did no such thing. He pulled vigorously and abruptly at one of my molars, and it came out with a jerk of pain. I had asked him to fill the cavities of my teeth,he had, instead, extracted a molar that was in perfect health !

He expressed surprise when I told him what he had done. I asked him to have a look at my decayed tooth. He took it out in a moment. Then he made a pull at another sound tooth. The pain was excruciating. I yelled at the man : "Are you a quack, or is this deliberate mischief. What do you mean by pulling out teeth indiscriminately without even a proper examination ? What sort

of a doctor are you" ? The fellow just frowned and then leered maliciously. I went out of the office nursing my injured jaw.

I told the comrades waiting for treatment what they were in for. There was indignation. Then Sewa Ram offered to see the matter through. He questioned me closely.

We waited long with curiosity. This is what he reported when he came back. "I went in and found the bloated rogue frowning and swearing.' He looked more a police inspector than a dentist. I bet he is a habitual drunkard. He measured me with his eyes from head to foot and ordered me gruffly to open my mouth. I did so, but I kept an eye on what he would do. He inserted his fingers in my mouth. I felt he was going to pull my tooth, so, I snapped my mouth shut. I am sure I had a good bite. The fellow withdrew his hand in a hurry. In an instant he caught hold of a syringe and poked its needle in my abdomen. I caught at the syringe but could not snatch it away because his grip was very strong. I have brought the needle with me. Here it is."

We looked at the needle and laughed heartily. There was funny side to the episode. The fellow might well have been taken for a veterinary doctor, but we were told later that he was the only dental surgeon in Government service in the whole of the province. The Superintendent had called in the most experienced dentist for us, though earlier he was unwilling to give us even as ordinary one. So this was the "medical aid" we had secured after weeks and weeks of protests and hunger-strikes and agitation by the public ! We had caught a tartar ! It was obvious that the Superintendent, in addition to telling this dental surgeon of our diseased teeth and gums, had also given him a peep into our black souls seething with the devilment of sedition ! The treatment given was meant, obviously, to exorcise the ghost of rebellion rather than to cure our teeth.

The remaining comrades requiring dental treatment continued to look much swollen around their cheeks for a couple of days, and presented an interesting sight to the occupants of Ward, No. 14 (Old).

CHAPTER XVI

"THOUGHTS SHAPE THE DESTINY OF MAN!"

THE court reopened after recess. We were rather eagerly waiting for the day when we would be able to enjoy our daily newspaper and have a chat with L. Sham Lal. Our lack of interest in the legal aspect of the case notwithstanding, the place had quite some attractions for us. The court brought us a breath of the outside words—crowlds of men busy on duty, others now idling in the visitors' galleries, now tense with suspense ; the quick changes in the faces of the judges, the clash between counsels—all these meant relief from the dull and oppressive jail routine.

There was so much I had planned to discuss with L. Sham Lal. When the opportunity now arose, I found myself drifting into the question, "Why do you think, Lalaji, that the line we revolutionaries follow is wrong ?"

Lalaji was the only defence counsel who took interest in our belief and ideas and felt pleasure in joining issue with us on the question of the method by which the independence of our country was to be achieved. Whenever we met him,and we normally did so once a week,we would flock round him and bombard him with questions which had hardly anything to do with our defence.

"What do you mean ?" inquired Lalaji, a bit surprised, not at the question but at the seriousness with which I had asked it.

I said revolutionaries resorted to violence, not for the fun of it but because it was productive of swift results and was thus preferable to the slow and tortuous method of non-violence. If I was right in this analysis, what other objection was there to our method ?

"The objection," he replied with a serenity so natural in a man of equable nature, "is not so much to violence itself as to its ephemeral character. You cannot sustain yourself permanently at the emotional pitch necessary for violent action. You flare up into activity, the duration of which is essentially short. It is like a flash in a pan. Non-violence, on the other hand, is the philosophy suitable for all times since it implies sustained effort".

"Soldiers like brisk actions and then peace", put in Pandit Rupchand, and I backed him by saying, "How can you expect non-violent activity from impatient youth? Do you think you can change the psychology of youth, that you can alter the physiology of youthful blood? Only prompt, vigorous action will appeal to youth".

Another of us piped in. "Had the police not caught us, we would have proved the injustice of your remark. We would have sustained our revolutionary effort."

"For a couple of months more," retrorted Lalaji good-humouredly, adding, "This police factor is another important consideration. A terrorist always finds himself in a blind alley in less than two years of active life. The police inevitably bring his activities to a standstill. Do you deny that?"

"How does that matter? Another comes and takes charge of his work. The police can arrest only individuals, not the cause," someone said. "Yes, the work never suffers for lack of men. There are always other hands ready to hold the banner aloft with their lives when one comrade falls," I said.

Conscious of the educative value of non-violence as a moral principle for mankind I never made a frontal attack on it as a creed. Otherwise also, the safe course with a skilful adversary in argument, like Lalaji, was to build our own case without a head-on clash. The question always boiled down to this: Could we, through violence, force the hands of the British rulers more swiftly? L. Sham Lal never ruled out this possibility, but as a staunch Gandhite he would aver that independence gained through violent means was not worth it. We always strongly differed with him on this point.

One truth was undeniable. The life that he lived bore out the reality that devotees of non-violence were as capable of sacrifice as those believing in violence. Our arguments were never conclusive. His views were deserving of respect because his actions were in conformity with them. Truth and non-violence did not accord with the picture of reality as we saw it but he-and others like him had their own vision of life, and he

lived up to the demands of this vision, whatever the sacrifice involved. His principle was that everyone should act according to his faith. He never tried to force his views on others.

Anyway, the argument on this day as well was inconclusive, I followed a new track now. "Has violence anything to do with inciting of racial antagonism between men of different races?" I asked. In the background of my thoughts, of course, was the inhumanity of the Jail Superintendent and the dental surgeon he had procured for us.

Lalaji was interested in finding out whether we hated the British rulers on racial grounds.

One or two said, "Yes", Others replied with an emphatic "No."

He was visibly pleased over this latter answer. It was plain, he said, that our rulers did have a sense of racial superiority, for that was the justification that they gave to their own coscience for ruling us. Their only superiority, however, was that they were industrially more advanced than ourselves. They resented it, he said, when we resisted the exploitation they carried on as a result of this superiority, and the resentment was there whether the resistance was violent or non-violent. "Obviously, then, our violence is not the basis of their hatred for us," I said.

"But violence adds to the existing bitterness", he replied, "and so it must be discarded as a weapon." He did not amplify how non-violent struggle would minimise this betterness but he had given us much material for thought.

Lalaji was spendingquite a good bit on ourrequirements such as books, magazines, articles of food, etc., out of the fees which he gotas our counsel, and after defraying the modest expenses of his household he donated the balance to Congress funds. He was day and night busy scanning papers, preparing for cross-examination of witnesses and consulting law books. Never for a moment did he think of even a single day of rest in spite of his steadily declining health. He was not the man to raise the structure of our defence on false alibis and untruths pitted against the

untruths of the prosecution, but was rather prepared to admit our complicity in general in the conspiracy, leaving it to the other party to prove each one's individual responsibility. Justice in his view became injustice when it was unfairly obtained, and he was planning a general onslaught on the methods adopted by the investigating police officials. False witnesses were to be produced to relate true events, true witnesses were being trained to give exaggerated statements. Much light had been thrown on these unfair tactics by Pandit Inderpal. Lalaji had impressed the court with his natural aptitude for fair-play and justice and had gained their respect. He had the same fair, equable, unruffled attitude to everybody whether friend or foe. A mighty confluence of divergent natures seems to have found harmony in his nature and to have shaped him into the simple easy, affable person he was.

"Can you never, never believe even for once in violence?" This question was put to him one day and not for the first time.

"Never," he replied with a great question-mark-like smile writ large over his features. This single word spoken without emphasis gained an indescribable force when backed by his mild and yet forceful personality.

"Why do you defend us when you consider our method wrong and foolish?" asked one of us.

The reply was accompanied by another broad, heart-warming smile, "Because the sacrifice even of fools has its value when the cause is worthy."

We laughed without feeling discomfited. It was impossible to feel offended with him. Taking the argument further, I enquired, "Haven't you taken into consideration the possibility that we or the like of us might feel encouraged in the methods of folly by your sympathetic attitude towards us?"

He told us with perfect equanimity that he had not come without entertaining some idea of reforming us!

"Have you considered the possibility that we may reform you instead?"

"Yes, yes! I am open to your influence. Try!" said he good-naturedly.

Optimistic though he was, like all men of strong faith, he nevertheless knew as a lawyer that convictions in most of the cases were inevitable. The second approver, Shiv Ram, had finished with his evidence and his younger brother, Saran Das, the third approver, had begun. Shiv Ram had nothing important to say against us but was produced first in the court because of his reliability as a sure tool in the hands of the police, which fact was meant to influence the weak and wavering witness, Saran Das, who was to follow and give a more relevant piece of evidence concerning the actitivities of the Party. Both fully supported the prosecution, making significant changes in their former statements before the magistrates but only where the complicity of one of the accused, Krishan Gopal of Rawalpindi in the conspiracy was concerned.

Our social meetings with Lalaji continued with the issue of violence versus non-violence still undecided. It was in fact never to be decided in his lifetime. He had, nevertheless, succeeded in bringing to us a clearer understanding of the Gandhian principles about which we had been previously in the dark.

We would sometimes ask Lalaji to make guesses about the sentence each one of us was likely to get. He was a great lawyer but such guesswork was beyond him. Any way, we knew that the final picture would by no means be pretty, it would, rather, bespattered with blood. And yet we were no better than the simple folk who, in their anxiety to know the future, show their hands to commonplace astrologers who tell them what they want to hear. We would ask him this question repeatedly, and the maximum he would say was that he was trying to see that the majority of us get from three to five years each! "I am concentrating my efforts on preventing death sentences and, God willing, I shall succeed," he would say.

He had already succeeded in obtaining discharge order for two of us, namely, Dharam Pal of Kangra and Harnam Singh of Sheikhupura. Bishan Das, Sirdar Singh and Maharaj Krishan

had been one by one enlarged upon bail. This was no small success for a lawyer in a case such as ours.

One of the junior counsel, Mehta Amar Nath, had been ailing for about six months and was unable to work. His place was taken by Lala Faqir Chand Mittal of Rohtak, who was a relative of Lala Sham Lal.

Some family feud or other had kept the two families for years wide apart, but Lalaji chose Mr. Mittal for his ability and worth as a lawyer without giving any thought to the strained relations existing between the two families, and his choice proved to be excellent. Mr. Mittal put tremendous energy and zeal into defence work and was of great help to Lala Sham Lal.

CHAPTER XVII

MORE OF THE KING'S EVIDENCE

AFTER Saran Das came Khairati Ram, son of Lala Radha Shah, a well-known millionaire of Shahdara. This approver was an excretion a sort of fistula of police growth. He had little to do with us, but after his arrest he assumed formidable proportions as a "revolutionary." If the prosecution story were to be believed, Rup Chand and Hans Raj "Wireless" of Lyallpur needed the benefit of his company in order to function, maybe, they took him with them for the specific purpose of his turning approver later and testifying against them—for the story was that they had taken him with them to Lyallpur, had got out of the train, had talked in his presence of their plans to rent a house and plant bombs there, had walked with him on the roads so that a large number of people to be produced later as witnesses against them should see them together? He had not participated in their "subversive" action, but had accompanied them back. Thus he was presented as a revolutionary without function whom these

two men had carried with them, was it as a mascot? or as a sightseer? The only part that he played, according to the prosecution story, was that he played no part whatsoever. It was difficult to see what he gained by becoming an approver, for the police did not have a scrap of evidence to prove his complicity in the conspiracy or to incriminate him in any manner and he would have been set free right in the beginning instead of remaining in prison for the duration of the case (about three years) if he had not turned approver. He was "well-connected," and I believe his people thought it quite an achievement that he had secured for the family the "honour" of being approver!

One charging feature of his evidence was that his statements before the police and the magistrate were verbatim identical—a fact that exposed the "cooked" nature of his statements. Was his memory so perfect as to allow no possibility of the slightest difference in the wording of the two statements given to two different authorities on two different occasions with an interval of several weeks between them? Lala Sham Lal, trying to ascertain the truth in the matter, asked during his cross-examination of the witness, "Did you give both these statements?"

"Yes!"

Lalaji took a copy of his statement and read aloud his description of my features. He then asked Khairati Ram to repeat from memory the items of my physiognomy in the same order in which they were just read before him. The witness proved a hopeless failure.

Madan Gopal, the fifth and the last of the approvers, gave a resounding blow to the expectations of the police officers by producing, out of his boots, certain papers given him to memorise. In addition to this he made startling allegations against the police officers in charge of the investigation which were similar in character to those made by Pandit Inderpal.

The approvers were kept in the Borstal Jail under the strictest watch possible, in complete seclusion from the rest of inmates of the jail. They could not communicate with anybody from inside or outside the jail without the permission of the C.I.D.,

the only authority for allowing interviews. Good care was taken to keep the approvers "whole," so that they may lose nothing of the value they were meant to have for the prosecution. Any prisoner seen shouting or talking aloud within hearing distance of the approvers' enclosure was liable to be punished. Madan Gopal was thoroughly searched before he was brought to the court. The C.I.D. officers, therefore, were flabergasted when he took out a suspicious looking paper from his boots and began to flaunt its contents in their face.

Their wrath against him was vented upon us. The Police Inspector who took charge of us from jail authorities at the wall gate underwent a sudden change of attitude and began to search us in so offensive a fashion that we felt humiliated and insulted. We were searched twice by the jail officers before we reached the wall gate from our ward. The third search was carried out by the police at the jail side of the gate and the fourth at the court side. The treatment of the police became rough and harsh, and animosity glared out of the Inspector's eyes whenever we met. He would threaten us with his cane when we objected to the new method of search. On several occasions he threatened us with lathi-charge and even shooting, alleging that some of us had made discourteous remarks against him. One day the court had to intervene in order to pacify him. All of us had now begun to attend the court regularly, and the tension between us and the police continued to mount. The police did not relent in spite of the instructions of the court to behave with moderation and propriety. We could not bear the degrading treatment to which we were subjected several times a day and decided to come to the court in loin cloth only.

The Milap of Lahore published the news about this unprecedented form of protest with the following couplet :

تن کی عریانی سے بہتر نہیں کوئی لباس
یہ وہ جامہ ہے کہ جس کا نہیں اُلٹا سیدھا

Our protest continued for more than a fortnight, while the weather was becoming colder. The police decided to yield at last, and a conciliatory attitude was adopted by them.

Pandit Jwala Parshad, the Public Prosecutor, might have entertained notions very different from those we had about the form of our protest, but he expressed much satisfaction at the conclusion of an unnecessary struggle.

One day some of us happened to observe the Public Prosecutor's junior at close quarters and came back one by one to our enclosure, nudging others to go and see. There was something, rather great thing, which had filled us with uncontrollable laughter. Next day Pandit Rupchand had a poem of considerable descriptive value ready, and was indiscreet enough to show it to Pandit Jwala Parshad, a man of literary parts. He said nothing by way of appreciation. He requested us to be as familiar with him as we liked, but spare his junior. We agreed.

Important witnesses bearing upon the main action of simultaneous bomb explosions were now produced one by one. We learnt from the statements of some of them that the police brought them from their homes two or three days before the day of evidence and lodged them in the Lahore Fort or in a portion of the Australia Building specially hired for the purpose. Special arrangements were made for them for the duration of their evidence. They were meanwhile not allowed to move freely and meet persons of their choice. It was not unexpected under the circumstances that an overwhelming majority of "independent" witnesses fully supported the case for the prosecution. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that they gave evidence under duress. A small minority, however, was courageous enough to speak the truth in spite of all the coaching and coaxing and threats of the police.

We also had another singular experience when identification of the accused became a matter of daily occurrence. We were made to stand in a line whenever a witness had to identify a

particular accused. Complete strangers succeeded in identifying us without the slightest hesitation. We had evidently been shown to the witnesses several times while under police custody, but that was about a year and a half ago and we had forgotten many faces seen in those days, so that the chance of a mistake by others in recognising us was, of course, there. One day we changed the order in which we were standing in a line just when a witness stepped out of the dock to have a look at us. The accused formerly standing fifth in the line was to have been identified but he had changed his place. The witness pointed out with his finger the comrade who was at number five, and said, "There!" When the court asked him twice : "Is he the man?" he replied with laboured emphasis, "Yes!"

This experience was repeated several times. This proved beyond doubt that a trick was being played upon us. One or two of us actually saw a police officer making signs with his fingers to a witness and the matter was reported to the judges but they said they had seen nothing.

Two old priests of Brahm Akhara, Gujranwala, the place of occurrence of the "bomb-outrage" wherein a police officer had been killed, were the most important eye-witnesses in the whole of the case, and they were taught their "lesson" with special care and effort. One of them, Mohkam Chand by name, was asked by the court to identify the two accused (Amrik Singh and myself) whom he had mentioned in his statements. The priest came to our line and passed in front of us a few times and said he could not identify either of them. Mr. Blacker, the President, and R. S. Ganga Ram were of the view that the witness was deliberately avoiding looking at the two of us and put a note to this effect in the record. The third judge, Mr. Sleem did not form such an opinion. He put this question to the witness :

"Mohkam Chand ! If we show you the real accused, would you be able to identify them ?"

The witness said he would try to. Amrik Singh and I were asked to stand up. He stared closely at us for a while and then, stuttered : "Yes, these are the very persons the police told me were the real culprits."

At this juncture the President expressed his willingness to expunge the remarks recorded about the witness a few minutes earlier, if Lala Sham Lal did not object, but Lalaji objected and the remarks remained on record.

The Public Prosecutor declared the witness hostile and sought the permission of the court to cross-examine him. The witness, replying to questions put to him by the Public Prosecutor, stated that he had identified the two persons who were shown to him during the police investigation from behind a curtain in the verandah of Akbari Mandi Police Station.

The second priest of Brahm Akhara corroborated the statement, saying that in his case, too, we had been pointed out by the police at the Akbari Mandi Police Station.

The Dental Surgeon who had once attended us in the jail Superintendent's office appeared as prosecution witness in our case as well as in the supplementary case of Sukh Dev Raj. He had examined a broken jaw said to have been Bhagwati Charan's and alleged to have been broken by a splinter from a bomb.

"I am certain the man whose jaw it was died because of the broken jaw," asserted the witness.

Sukh Dev Raj, himself cross-examining, asked him, "Are you certain that the broken jaw caused his death ?"

"Yes, I am certain," repeated the witness.

"How can you be so sure in this opinion ?"

"I am an authority on matters concerning human teeth."

The more he was questioned the more firm he became in this assertion. Sukh Dev Raj confronted him with the testimony of the Civil Surgeon of the Mayo Hospital to the effect that the person had died because of a big wound in his abdomen, and then asked:

"Do you think the Civil Surgeon was wrong in his opinion?" "Decidedly. I am the only authority on bones in the whole of the province and my opinion is that he died of the broken jaw," insisted the witness.

He little knew that he was not helping the prosecution case as he thought but spoiling it by obstinately sticking to his opinion. The prosecution story, as already told, was that Bhagwati Charan was mortally wounded in the abdomen and asked his two companions to return to the city. How could he speak with his jaw broken !

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PROSECUTION CONCLUDES : THE LEGAL MURDER IS CONSUMMATED

The prosecution took about two years to present all their witnesses. It was a long period affording us wide experience of men in their official and unofficial capacity. We had by now a clear idea of the average type of man appearing in the character of a witness in a case. We had come across men who had shown unwarranted hostility and others who had given unsolicited help ; all had left their imprint on the running reel of our consciousness and moulded our minds with their diverse attitudes. People had moved and shaken us, helped us and hated us, exalted us or thrown us down ; many had hit us below the belt, and we, the recipients, inspirers or victims of love, hatred or friendship, had grown wiser. The heat of years of clash and clangour was by now over. There was a coolness in the atmosphere which led to understanding and sympathy even for those who were actively opposed to us. (This aspect of our contacts was now more human than ever before.)

We did not now regard Pandit Jwala Parshad as a wily Brahmin thinking only in terms of prosecution tactics, but were rather charmed by his sedate personality, by his wisdom and learning and his views on various subjects of interest such as art, psychology and the great men of the age. We would take pleasure in conversation with him and shared an occasional joke with him.

Mr. Blacker, the President, had forgotten his habit of looking askance for long at us with vague suspicion peeping out of his eyes that we were some sort of perverse creatures. He would puff up his cheeks, rest his cheek on one of his hands and become apparently indifferent to what was happening around him. He would now and then blow his nose with a terrific noise and then look complacently towards those sitting in front of him. He had assumed in our eyes the bearing of a patriarch, indulgent and mild.

It goes to the credit of the judges that whatever points of conflict arose between them and the accused were dealt with in a spirit of cool understanding by them. They had conducted the case in an atmosphere devoid of unseemly prejudice and unbecoming hostility on either side.

All this progressive improvement in our relations with the court and the Public Prosecutor was in a great measure due to the salutary influence of Lala Sham Lal over all who came in contact with him. Always cheerful, always unruffled, always serene, he steered the course of our destiny with ease in spite of the heavy burden upon his shoulders. He had an amazing abundance of good will for everybody in his heart. We loved him, the judges respected him, and those on the side of the prosecution could not help admiring him for his qualities of head and heart. An outstanding Congress leader in the province, he was a veteran soldier in the cause of freedom who had suffered imprisonment in various struggles the Congress had launched. His defence of us was based on moral grounds, and his methods were in consonance with the requirements of truth, so that he would never bow to the exigencies of legal evidence, would never employ a false witness to prove even an incident that had actually happened, never fabricate anything even in the interest of justice. He based his defence on our inherent right to fight for the independence of our country. One of his major targets was to expose the unfair and reprehensible tactics adopted by the police during the investigation of the case. He pleaded for our acquittal on the grounds of doubtful evidence that had been produced in connection with various actions with which we were individually and collectively charged.

Long overwork had greatly taxed his energies and he broke down in health. His foot had lately swollen with gout, giving him much pain. He was hardly able to move about but would not agree to take rest for a single day.

He had filed an application in the High Court on behalf of Sukh Dev Raj. It was to be heard by Mr. Justice Broadway, and Sukh Dev Raj had no faith in him and so wanted to withdraw his application. Lalaji prayed for the withdrawal on this ground according to the instructions given him by his client.

Mr. Justice Broadway took this plea as a slight and called upon Lala Sham Lal to show cause why he should not be prosecuted for contempt of court. The law in those days provided unlimited powers to the High Court to sentence to any length of imprisonment a person found guilty of contempt of court. Lalaji had to appear on the date fixed by the judge to answer the charge. He explained to us the implications of the case against him which might mean an indefinite period of imprisonment. He would not be in a position to defend our case if convicted. To express unqualified regret–apparently the only way out of the difficulty–for what was considered by him not an affence but an honest discharge of his duty to wards his client, would have been wholly insincere and altogether incompatible with the high moral principles for which he always stood. There was no intention at all of the slightest disrespect on his part, but for this very reason he owed the judge no apology.

Lalaji asked our opinion in the matter. He would do anything for our sake, even tender an apology. We would not hear of it. All of us whole-heartedly supported him in his principled and honourable stand and wanted him to uphold it, whatever the consequences. Lalaji was no doubt indispensable to us ; no lawyer could replace him at this stage of our trial, and his imprisonment would have meant a serious setback to the defence, but we were quite prepared to face all this.

He appeared on the appointed day before Mr. Justice Broadway, who asked him to express regret for what he had said on behalf of his client. Lalaji refused to do so on the ground that he was within the bounds of legal propriety when he had told

the judge that his client had no faith in him. The judge pondered over the courageous and frank reply of Lalaji and decided to take a lenient view of the matter. The contempt of court charge was thus not pursued further !

The prosecution had produced their last witness and now the charges against us had to be framed. The President, cutting short an argument of Lala Sham Lal, enquired. "Well, Mr. Sham Lal, who else could have committed all these crimes if not the accused present here ?" and Lalaji replied. "Sir, I do not claim that the accused are innocent. My contention, on the other hand, is that the court has to sift carefully the doubtful evidence which has become more doubtful because of the falsehoods and exaggerations mixed up in it ; the forgeries alleged to have been committed by certain police officers as according to the deposition of the approvers Inderpal and Madan Gopal are to be reckoned with. . ."

Lalaji made a spirited attack on the methods adopted by some police officers during the investigations and in this he was on perfectly justifiable ground ; but knowing the truth of a matter and proving it to the full satisfaction of a third party critical of the contentions of either of the two disputants over an issue are two quite different matters, and Lalaji could hardly stress the point further.

We had to make our statements before charges were framed. There were those who wanted to admit their part in the conspiracy and honourably and frankly express their views about terrorism. Others thought differently. We had prolonged discussions wherein the legal group took a most active part against those who were in favour of open confession. Our views were considered insufficient for lack of legal opinion. It was decided at last that we should take counsel with Lala Sham Lal and his juniors before coming to a final conclusion. Apart from moral considerations, the strictly legal view that we obtained was that what we might confess would be taken as undeni-

able facts in the case, while what we might deny whould be taken as weak points especially sorted out of the prosecution story, Another point made clear to us was the impossibility of our being able to impress the judges with the truthfulness of our character. One of the junior counsels opined that the only result of the confessions by some of us would be to bolster up the lies of the police as cardinal truths. Our lawyers, especially Lalaji, had nothing to say against any step we might feel morally bound to take. There were those amongst us whose part in the whole conspiracy was quite insignificant. We were told they were likely to get long sentences if others decided to confess. It would decidedly be wrong to be the cause of bringing undeserved punishment to the mere sympathisers and well-wishers of the revolutionaries as a corollary to our zeal for righteousness! We decided, therefore, to deny the charges.

I filed a written statement admitting my being a revolutionary and professed views of a general nature without referring to any particular acts of mine which had resulted from those views.

Charges were framed against us of murder, abetment of murder, dacoity, keeping and using of dangerous explosives, etc. We knew that the failure of certain witnesses under cross-examination, the descrepancies in their statements and the courageous upholding of truth by some were matters that had impressed only us and not the judges, since the attitude of the judges was not determined by moral but legal considerations. What we considered to be instances of grave interference with justice were, to them, flaws in police procedure unfit for any serious notice by the court. What Pandit Inderpal had told against us was regarded by them as unmixed truth, and what he did not say would be considered an omission, deliberate or otherwise. There were other witnesses to fill in the gaps left by him. A judge could believe a small part of some evidence as true and discard the rest as false. If there were twelve

witnesses of an incident, eleven of whom were proved to be wholly unreliable, the judge could still sentence an accused by relying solely on the evidence of the twelfth.

So much for the legal aspect in which we had hardly any interest. The reality had been long foreseen by us through a different process of reasoning. This conspiracy case, in our view, was but a continuation of our fight against the foreigners in control of our destiny and against the moral degradation of those custodians of law and order who never missed a chance of proving their loyalty by resorting to excessive use of force against our unarmed masses waging a non-violent struggle. The moral of all morals for a revolutionary was to keep burning the fire of Revolution. We regarded ours but a part of the struggle. We stood by our duty, each according to the circumstances of his case. The Government were exercising their right of trying, punishing, suppressing us; our party outside had exercised the right to revolt; it had asked the youth of the country to exercise this right to the best of their ability. We were here because the freedom of our country had become a live issue for us. The slave-owners never admitted the right of the slaves to rebel. Our imperialist exploiters measured the violent and non-violent opposition to their exploitation with the same rod. Legitimate and peaceful movements had been met with organised brutality; the non-violent army of Satyagraha had nothing but lathi-charges and bullets to face. Had our rulers differentiated between violent and non-violent methods, they would have been in a better moral position to condemn our activities. They had the power but not the moral right to punish us. Our trial served the purpose of focussing public attention on the issue of violence; this was what we had always been aiming at. We had never been in favour of violence unless driven to it; non-violence carried to the extent of a fad was even more undesirable. In the mean was the cold logic of a relentless struggle. This was one of the lessons every participant in the struggle had to learn sooner or later. We

claimed that reason was on our side, and felt duty bound to deny the charge of unlicensed, unprincipled criminal violence levelled against us.

We were free to think but not to act. The conditions in the prison were fundamentally different from those outside. Studies, discussions and the thirst for useful political knowledge were our main concern now. Practical life had begun to drink deep at the spring of theory and armed conflict had given place to a fight in which ideas played the main part. The change-over from the physical to the mental plane was not a set-back at all. The coming convictions were no bar to our mental growth, the certainty of death-sentences for some of us encumbered no one's thoughts. We expected no leniency from the law, the chief object of which was to maintain our slavery; we cherished no hope which might weaken our resolve to carry on the struggle. These attitudes were the signs of a rising wave of enthusiasm. Life in those days was really too wonderful to be depicted in terms of logic and fact!

We had, at the outset, expected no smooth sailing but conflict with the court at every step in our trial. The experience of the first conspiracy case taught the Government as much as it did us: the memory of the martyrs in that case affected friend and foe alike, though in different fashions. The Government tried to avoid many of the mistakes they had committed then; the judges were on their guard not to allow their prejudices to show. A great factor was the personality of L. Sham Lal, the inveterate peace-maker. The result was that no major clashes occurred. During the first few days of our trial, we might have appeared to the judges as fanatical cut-throats; they had seemed to us bigoted law-twisters, but there had been a persistent though gradual softening of attitude on both sides, the only exception being the police, whose brutality seemed immune to all human influences and who could never develop the objectivity which enables a reasonable human being to understand and appreciate the motives and mental attitudes of even an enemy.

Re-cross-examination of prosecution witnesses, defence witnesses and the arguments and counter-arguments for summing up the case of both sides took a year more before the final judgment was pronounced.

Bhag Ram had, meanwhile, become a total wreck in health, a dead loss to the prosecution. The Superintendent-cum-Medical Officer of the jail still persisted in the view that he was a malingerer. He had been examined by several medical men in Government service but only one doctor from the Mental Hospital of Lahore had given an opinion to the effect that his was a case of hysteria, whereas all others had confiemed the Superintendent's view. Bhag Ram had become a paralytic, and was slowly but surely nearing his end. The case against him was withdrawn, but he was not set free. The police came to take him away to Gujrat Jail where he was confined as a State Prisoner. He remained there for some months and was then transferred to Rawalpindi District Jail. They set him at liberty at last, but he did not live to see another day. It was like exposing a flickering flame to the pitiless buffets of a gale. They waited to release him till the fact of release itself seemed to have grown into a shock that killed him.

The Sub-Assistant Surgeon of the jail, who accompanied him from Rawalpindi on his last journey to his home at Jammu, was later transferred to our jail. We learnt from him that Bhag Ram had breathed his last a few hours after reaching Jammu in the evening. He had attended upon him to the last and was deeply affected by the tragedy. He further disclosed that there were standing orders to release him only when his death became imminent. If there was ever a murder committed, here was one. He was killed because he was a revolutionary. The weapon that killed him was the charge of his being a malingerer. Even his death, perhaps, did not convince his murderous detractors that his complaints had been genuine perhaps they thought he had carried his malingering too far, and had acted his part so realistically that he had died.

CHAPTER XIX

THE JUDGMENT

OUR trial had not yet ended. Many of the defence witnesses had, during their statements, thrown light on the measures adopted by the police to terrorise people into giving evidence against us. They stated how the prosecution witnesses lodged in the Lahore Fort or the Australia Building were made to feel the power and influence of the police. They related tales of the high-handedness of the investigating officers. Some of the defence witnesses were men who had themselves been arrested within a few days of the bomb–outrages in six different places. In some instances the cases prepared against them on the basis of extorted confessions were about to begin in courts of law. There might have been convictions but for our arrest in the meanwhile. Those who testified in our defence inevitably incurred the wrath of the police but they dared to tell the truth and braved risks in doing so.

The court rose for summer vacation. All was changed when it re-opened. The judges, who had so far been lenient in view and generous in interpretation of the law, became stiff and stern with the full consciousness of their duty to award punishment. We felt the change, especially in the attitude of the youngest judge, Mr. Sleem, who had always impressed us with his enlightened outlook. Pandit Jwala Parshad and Lala Sham Lal argued and summed up their cases. The arguments of our defence counsel, including those formerly accepted by the judges, seemed to cut notice now. The Public Prosecutor was happy that he had no need to argue much. The case was considered to be proved. The Tribunal adjourned to write the judgment. It was delivered on the 13th December, 1933, R.S. Ganga Ram Soni read it aloud to us in his usual unflattering, clear vioce The following sentences in brief were awarded :

Gulab Singh: Death sentence. Eight sentences of transportation for life, one for twenty years and other for fifteen years rigorous imprisonment amounting in aggregate to about 75 years.

Amrik Singh : Death Sentence.

Rupchand : Transportation for life and rigorous imprisonment aggregating to about 75 years.

Jahangiri Lal : Transportation for life and rigorous imprisonment aggregating to about 75 years.

Malik Kundan Lal : Transportation for life and imprisonment aggregating to about 50 years.

Malik Nathu Ram: 7 years' rigorous imprisonment.

The ten remaining accused got from two to four years each.

Bishan Dass of Rawalpindi who was on bail because of his illness had died recently.

Dharam Vir, Jai Parkash, Dianat Rai, Bansi Lal and Maharaj Krishan were acquitted. The rest had been discharged at different stages of the trial.

Sukh dev Raj was awarded three years' rigorous imprison ment.

All the approvers were discharged by the court, but the police arrested Pandit Inderpal in the court compound on the ground that he had detracted from his former statement and had thus forfeited the claim to pardon as King's witness. He was to face his trial for his part in the conspiracy. The police had already marked him as their enemy No. 1 when he had only half begun his evidence in the court. Our hearts went out to him in sympathy, for he had refused to become a tool of the police under the most trying circumstances in his life. He was subsequently sentenced to death.

The chapter of our trial was at an end. From now on prison was to be our permanent abode. On this last day came all the high police officials concerned with the investigation or conduct of the case, our friends and relatives, and a large number of men and women from the city. We bade good-bye to Pandit Jwala Parshad, the legal genius behind the successful termination of the prosecution case, and the fact did not escape our notice that he was, unlike the police officers present, not so jubilant as he may very well have been.

"Shall we be able to obtain a very dissimilar judgment from the High Court ?" enquired Dianat Rai, one of the released comrades.

"Not very much !" replied the learned Pandit sententiously. It was an honest and wise opinion indeed.

Dianat Rai then put an awkward question to him without realising his duties as the counsel for the Crown.

"Will you insist upon the death sentences in the High Court ?" he asked. The Public Prosecutor remained silent and, contemplating the bundle of papers lying on the table in front of him, answered after a while in a subdued voice, "My case is proved. I need not speak about the sentences !"

Lala Sham Lal was meanwhile busy with the judges who were finishing their business that day. He had requested them to recommend "B" class treatment for us and to instruct the jail authorities to let us remain in the Lahore jail till the decision of our appeal. The judges, while making both the recommendations, remarked, "All these are well-behaved young men belonging to decent families and deserve better status !"

We had about an hour's interview with Lala Sham Lal, Lala Faqir Chand Mittal, Mr. Amolak Ram Kapur and Mehta Pran Nath, our defence counsels. They had assiduously applied themselves to the work of defence for the past three years. It was no mean success for them to have obtained the acquittal of about ten accused out of a total of twenty-seven. But that was not all. In the course of our association with them L. Sham Lal had come to be more than a mere counsel, and our talk on this day grew into warm, intimate, lively conversation in a family group : a father talking to his grown-up boys rather than a talk between counsel and clients. They soon departed, and so did our relatives and friends who had come to hear the judgment.

The released comrades also now left us. Dianat Rai, who had the most exuberant spirit amongst us all, hugged me close and asked me in a whisper what I thought of Pandit Jwala

Parshad's words. I could not help smiling at the question nor could I help giving him a bit of advice as he was the youngest of us all. He must learn to curb his exuberance, I told him he must learn moderation and sobriety. As for myself, I was glad he had been acquitted and so many had received such light sentences. My own death sentence I could carry lightly: I had never expected anything less.

The farewell over, we came out into the open courtyard. Here, the police constables who had been on duty in court for the last three years bade us good-bye. There were actually tears in the eyes of some of them. The wall gate opened to let us in. One of the police constables was shaking hands with one of us, when a European Inspector chanced to appear on the roof of the court building. He ordered the constable to lay down his belt then and there. We learnt later that he was dismissed that very day because of the unpardonable offence of "shaking hands with murderers" like us. We felt hurt and sorry, but what could we do ?

Inside the Jail, we stood under the plum tree in front of the condemned cells, where a jail officer had been waiting to enter our names, sentences and other particulars in his register. The jail authorities knew before hand what the judgment was but the warrants had not yet arrived. The officer was not a little uneasy about two of the condemned prisoners who were idly walking about in the jail garden, but he could not immediately order them into the condemned cells without legal authority.

We remained in the garden for about three hours, enjoying the company of comrades which was so soon to be denied us. My ideas were quite clear and unclouded by emotion. What I had told Dianat Rai was true, and there was nothing unexpected in the judgment. If anything, the sentences were lighter in many cases than what I had expected. The judges had shown leniency in cases where the charges were milder but had treated the serious cases differently. That was a natural attitude for them to adopt after coming to the conclusion that we were guilty. Malik Kundan Lal and Pandit Rupchand may well have

been given capital sentences–they got off, however, with transportation for life. Since I had schooled myself to expect the worst, the actual result was heartening rather than otherwise. I thought, in retrospect, that with the gradual lapse of time a change had come upon the judges, the police, the accused and others connected with our case–time had mellowed us all. The recent remarks of the Public Prosecutor were, to my mind, not expressive of his particular attitude towards death sentences, but of his general feeling of good-will towards all of us. Our long social contact, however formal, had resulted in a spirit of mutual understanding and accommodation. An illuminating example of this could be had in the court's intercession with the Jail Superintendent for allowing us certain facilities even when they had no legal authority to do so. They were not so obliging in the beginning when it was usually difficult to impress them with the genuineness of a complaint or the fairness of a request.

The reasons for the hardened attitude of the police officers were many. The foremost was their consciousness that our main action was directed against them and that they would always remain the main target of our activities. The nature of their job- as they understood it–made it imperative for them to keep up a show of unlimited, unquestioned, arbitrary authority. It was their job to maintain a foreign Government in power– a Government that was growing daily more and more unpopular; and they could do so only if they could inspire terror. We stood in their way; we questioned their authority; we threatened to punish them for their excesses. There was, therefore, no easing of the conflict for them even after our conviction was secured. In fact our action was not aimed at the police system as a whole but against those members of it who formed part of the gigantic machine which crushed the natural aspirations of our countrymen. Any lover of freedom might, by way of protest against actions calculated to stop progress and safeguard tyranny, ask : "If the tyrant is justified in the use of force, why not the victim?" We did not merely ask the question but

went a step further and actively joined the struggle against tyranny. The warm, fresh blood coursing through our veins spurred us to action. We struck the blow in the name of the country and with the best of motives. It was a part of our programme to expect reprisals-death sentences were a part of the game we had undertaken to play. Something within had always been urging me on towards an ever greater utilisation of my energies. I had the ever-increasing satisfaction of being on the right path, and I was by no means non-plussed when the yawning abyss in my path opened its jaws, for we were all quite prepared for such chasms to swallow us.

My comrades' conversation touched upon various topics such as the death sentences, the judgment as a whole, and less serious topics of police and jail administration. I was only taking an intermittent interest in their talk because of my preoccupation with ideas of my own which came, not at a stretch but in successive flashes. I had in this way run the gamut of the whole under-trial period and made several sweeping generalisations without being communicative about them. I told myself, for example, that we had become more human after the power to strike was wrested from our hands. Were our human feelings a spontaneous growth or only a spurious creation of the conditions of dependence and inactivity thrust upon us? Was not self-pity the source of all fellow feeling? I had no opportunity to find answers for such searching questions after careful analysis.

I became conscious of the fact that my brother and I were objects of special care and attention on the part of the rest of our comrades. It also occurred to me that a difference, though slight, had come to exist between our respective conditions of living from now on. We were, so to say, no more to appear on the same plane, see the same horizon before us and lead a similar life. They looked serious in varying degrees in their attempts to conceal their anxiety about our fate. We, a well-knit group, were by stages sorted out, weighed, labelled and separated by powers beyond control. The idea put a stop to

the parallel flow of my thought and turned my undivided attention towards my comrades. The conversation warmed up as we took a lively interest in each other's thought of the moment.

More than two hours had passed. The unhurried, matter-of-fact voice of the Assistant Superintendent in charge of the condemned cells rang out:

"Let us go!"

The comrades began to embrace my brother and me. "We shall meet again within a few days," they said.

At the gate stood Ramzan, the Lambardar of Ward No. 15, an old prisoner who had been on duty there for many years. He had been there when S. Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukh Dev occupied these cells. He had seen them hanged. He had under his charge several revolutionaries who had met their end at the gallows. Hari Krishan of the Governor Shooting Case had lived here in his time; Ranbir Singh, Durga Dass Khanna and Chaman Lal of the same case had occupied these cells. He could relate many a story about the revolutionaries who had been set at liberty or sent to the gallows after some month's stay in Ward No. 15. S. Sajjan Singh of the Lahore Cantonment Murder Case had gone to the scaffold in the presence of Ramzan, who had helped him don the pre-execution dress. Sajjan Singh had planned to kill a European Military Officer. He went to his house, found that he was not there and returned. On his way back an idea occurred to him. "Why not kill the members of the family of the officer? Had the British allowed any scruples to stand in their way when they massacred Indians without discrimination of age and sex in Jallianwala Bagh ?" With this thought, he went back to the officer's house and committed the murders.

One of the duties of Ramzan was to prepare prisoners for their journey to the gallows. He was the man who went early in the morning to the cell of the prisoner who had to die and announced, "Rise my friend, your time has come! Here is a bucketful of water; take a bath and remember your God!"

It was he who with the help of jail warders tied the condemned prisoner's hands behind his back and fastened his shoulders.

"Ramzan! Are the cells ready?" I asked.

"Yes, we had got two cells vacated early in the morning and washed and cleaned them too," he replied with a sense of pride at his knowledge of our death sentences even before they were actually pronounced.

Within a few minutes the clothes were brought which we were to wear as condemned prisoners. We put them on while our comrades stood outside watching us. Their features reflected the impressions of what this change over implied. The Assistant Superintendent outside was still busy entering their names and other details in his register, when we were led into the cells.

PART III

CHAPTER I

"AS ONE OF THEM"

IN the forty condemned cells lay forty human beings, forty useless, obnoxious things waiting for the day when they would be dumped under soil. They were hale and hearty persons, young and old, good and bad, all sorts. They spoke, sang, laughed, ate and talked activities that were proposed to be stopped by the noose of a halter. Two of them had left for the old condemned cell in Ward No. 14, in order to make room for us.

It was a small cell, about eight feet wide and ten feet long. The prisoner walked, ate, slept and prayed here. This was his bath room, his lavatory, his study, his temple, his mosque, in short, his entire world rolled into one small, filthy, all-purpose cell, a hell-hole that was both a home and a grave. He had to remain locked in it day in and day out till the denouement of the drama of his life. This cell, similar to all others in the ward, was unclean with spots of expectoration, of urine, of life and death. The marks of expectoration on the walls and the floor appeared fresh when washed with water. Specimens of sickly, dying humanity had been here, living badly and praying incessantly, but the law of the land had been too stern for them.

Men, unfortunate men, had lived in this cell. They had thought, felt, breathed under the nerve racking pressure of impending death. The memory of them all received and enveloped me as I was pushed into the place and locked in and left alone. I was but one in an infinite series of tiny creatures to be wiped out; the latest little bundle of life awaiting its turn in the queue of annihilation. I had to accept this inheritance of death-awaiters

and add to it the share of memories my own death would leave behind. It was neither like entering a new profession nor learning a new art, because death could not be a profession, nor an art, whatever way one looked at it.

There were eleven warders on duty in those cells that day. They came to see me one by one. Some showed sympathy, others grief, and a few curiosity regarding the newcomer. An old acquaintance remarked : "Be courageous all the time you are here, and remember, you should go singing and shouting when your day comes !"

Luckily, he saw my point when I pointed out that since I was a bad singer, I would only shock sensitive ears if I went to the gallows singing, and that I would not like to die with this thought weighing on my conscience that I had caused aesthetic agony to fellow-beings in the very act of disappearing. I urged this in all gravity and he accepted my plea with an equally grave face, though he had made his suggestion just to make conversation and thus break the monotony of his four-hour vigil at my door. On that particular day I had not had a moment's rest from morning till late in the night, so I felt tired and went off to sleep.

I rose at about nine in the morning. The warder on duty, seeing me open my eyes, exclaimed, "You were sleeping fast and a man has been taken out of his cell and hanged! He was a Pathan !"

I had a feeling of remorse at missing the chance of exchanging a parting word with a dying fellow-prisoner, and enquired gloomily, "Why did you not wake me?"

"What for, my friend," asked the warder, a bit amused at my impatience with myself.

"To see him, to bid him the last farewell," I replied with a pang in my heart.

He pointed towards the sheet-iron door of the compound of my cell and said, "They are all closed when someone is taken

to the gallows, so you could not have seen him even if you had been awake at that time."

"I have seen several men go," he went on in a cynical tone. "but never such a rabbit of a man who went today. It was quite a job for Ramzan to bathe him and to make him wear black garments; the fellow was yelling all the time, and fighting. His shoulders were tied while he rolled on the ground. All the condemned prisoners walk to the scaffold but this one had to be dragged along by force. Even God's name had gone out of him in abject terror of the rope! Weeping and crying is common enough and one can quite understand that, but this fellow was the limit."

He must be dangling bravely enough now, with neither a trace of fear nor life left in him, thought I.

Ramzan came back from the scaffold and entering my cell remarked with a tired look in his eyes: "Oh, what an obstinate person the Pathan was! It was a hell of a job to make him stand upon the wooden plank."

"Life is obstinate," I observed solemnly. Ramzan gave same further unhallowed details of the Pathan's execution and when he went out the warder, resting his hands upon the bars of the cell-door, resumed his talk. "Here is Ramzan," he said, "a guide to the gallows. He has no sentiments, no sensitiveness to death; and only knows how best to perform his duty of preparing men for the halter, but you will understand him better if you knew more about him, especially the story of his trial and conviction."

"What is it?" I asked, feeling interested.

"He was a warder in Rajanpur Jail, a mere boy at that time. One day, it was the festival of 'Id,' one of his Baloch countrymen happened to meet him outside the jail-gate and told him that he had come to see some of his relatives who were undergoing imprisonment there. How can I celebrate 'Id' unless my unfortunate relatives too can have a tasty morsel to-

day ?"cried the Baloch, and importunately requested Ramzan to carry to them some Halwa which he had brought.

"Ramzan, the boy of tender feelings, was moved by the sentiments of the stranger and showed willingness to do as requested though he was running the risk of dismissal from service if he was caught smuggling prohibited articles.

"It so transpired that the stranger was in fact not a friend of the prisoners but a cunning enemy. There was poison in the sweet Halwa and two of the prisoners who ate it died. Ramzan was arrested, found guilty and sentenced to death. So he was once a condemned prisoner like all of you. Later on, the High Court commuted his sentence to that of transportation for life. Ever since he has been in the service of the condemned. He might have, in the beginning, felt a sort of relief while leading others to the gallows, at the idea of his fortunately not being one of them but even that sort of satisfaction is a short-lived one. Do you see what an automatic machine he has become now ?"

So this was the story of Ramzan, who had come to be a cog in the machinery of death by the very passing of years. The humanity in him was labouring persistently though feebly to break through.

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CHAPTER II

ALL ARE ONE AND THE SAME

WE, my brother and I, were "B" class prisoners but no other facility except that of "B" class diet was allowed to us. The jail authorities had written to the Government for instructions and after some days we were allowed to remain outside our cells in handcuffs, one at a time, till the evening lock-up. It was a great mental relief to bathe outside, to use the outer latrine, and most of all, to be able to see and converse with the

fellow condemned prisoners. A prisoner might not feel a bit uneasy about his impending death, but he might not be able to eat his food without nausea while his face lay uncovered in a corner of his cell.

Lala Sham Lal came to see us after he had filed an appeal on our behalf in the High Court. The comrades from Ward No. 14 were also called for the interview which took place in the open compound near the gate. Blankets were spread on the ground and we all sat round Lalaji in a manner reminiscent of his first interview with us more than three years ago. It was he who had talked then, but now he was the listener for the most part and we the talkers. He was then anxious about our fate but today that fate was a reality devoid of all fears, for fears are the outcome of uncertainty. He now wanted us to be strong and resolute.

"We should strive for the better without showing any weakness for better results," said he, the man of unflinching courage and faith who had striven for our good in the character of a true and noble friend, in the role of a peacemaker, in the capacity of lawyer. It was now for us to reassure him that the present life was not much different from that we had already led in the jail.

"Did you not feel life here particularly oppressive?" he asked.

"There was the feeling of inconvenience under excessive restraint but it is now gone since more latitude is allowed to us," I replied.

"Your relatives have proposed the name of a distinguished lawyer, the ablest in the province, for arguing your case in the High Court. His services can be hired if all of you, especially the two brothers in these cells, so desire," he informed us with the purpose of ascertaining our opinion.

"What is the use of bringing in a new lawyer?" I asked. "The situation has changed. Your people naturally feel worried because of the capital sentence," he replied gravely.

Some of the comrades insisted that our opinion in the matter should weigh with the rest. We were thus given a position of privilege and found ourselves the centre of much anxiety and unusual consideration. This differentiation was not at all to our liking, especially in matters relating to our defence, and we felt called upon to dispel the embarrassing sort of anxiety felt about us and to reiterate our faith in Lalaji. We did this without the slightest hesitation and in the most unambiguous terms.

"You have given me a second vote of confidence and I shall serve you to the best of my ability," said Lalaji in his usual cheerful way and added, "but as a faithful believer should always say, the result is in His hand."

Somehow no one in that day brought up the topic of unending discussion- violence versus non-violence-thought there was much else that kept us engaged in lively conversation for more than an hour, and then Lalaji left, promising to come again after the date for the hearing of our appeal was fixed.

We were permitted to see the rest of our comrades twice a week. The interview with them took place regularly in the compound of our ward. Our brothers and other relatives also came to see us once a week. We were allowed books we wanted to read. Life had thus become as normal as it could be in the circumstances. Every evening the condemned prisoners raised religious slogans and greeted one another loudly from their respective cells. My brother and I were let out in the morning at different times and we could talk to our fellow-prisoners. It was an opportunity to familiarise ourselves with the living, the half-dead and the all-but-dead, and to know how they felt, thought, believed. It is amazing what a strong hold life has on us; it overweighs worries, unhappy memories of crimes committed and puñishments suffered. We mixed with these condemned men as no strangers, but as their fellows. Even the certainty of approaching death could not smother the spark of life which could flash in the gloom of impending annihilation.

Here was a place where man could not be critical of man, and where neither hatred nor love had any meaning-all that mattered was fellow-feeling and good will. Life here was reduced

to its barest minimum, and the subjects that interested us in conversation were those that form the bedrock of life. Loud talk linked one to another. Out of forty cages rose one voice tuned to one pitch, saying different things but meaning nothing more than that they were alive and wanted to live. Life here touched its most primitive level;this life in captivity had no other purpose but to eke itself out till death would strangle it extinct. Life at this ebb, I felt, was very much like death whether one realised it or not.

Another man had to go within a few days. I was not a little uneasy about him. The hour of doom had come for him. He was a young Sikh and raised the familiar religious shout of "Bole so Nihal" after he had bathed. All the condemned prisoners, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, responded with one voice "Sat Sri Akal!" The sheet-iron doors in front of my cells were closed. The warder on duty peeped out through the small circular opening and told me they were tying his shoulders. His shouts continued to reach me.

A strong force of warders and jail staff came thumping into the ward and stood in a line between the two rows of cells. The Superintendent arrived a few minutes afterwards along with a magistrate and went straight to the cell of the young Sikh. The chief warder gave orders for the unlocking of the cell and the man was taken out. His shouts became increasingly vehement till his voice began to crack. My cell was the last in the row. He halted in front of it for a moment and cried, "All my Hindu, Muslim and Sikh brothers, I am leaving you. Forgive me my faults."

I could hardly catch a fleeting glimpse of a part of his face through the chink in the door and he was gone like a flying patch of living flesh. His voice grew feebler till the crashing sound of the falling wooden plank silenced him for ever.

The sound of the plank was but an echo reverberating in the ears of the living but the dying man passed beyond hearing it. I pictured him as hanging in the dry well with his neck

twisted and his body stiffened, and felt a pang for the first time since my confinement in these cells. He was in fact a member of the family to which we all belonged by right of forfeited lives and his death was an emphatic reminder of the fact that I was on the waiting list. I thought of him and he made me think of myself. Why was I so much pained by the execution of this young man when I was determined to treat my own cheerfully in consonance with revolutionary traditions? But reason as I may, I could not prevent being haunted by that young face. The sympathy for him had no doubt recoiled on myself. Perhaps the compassion it aroused in me was the outcome of the prospects of my own death in the near future! Sympathy is a two-edged sword: it sacrifices-or saves not only him who arouses sympathy but also him who sympathises. I wanted to forget this incident and tried to drown my thoughts in the book, "The Taking of the Bastille." It was in vain. The pages of the book were haunted by the vague vision of a great crime and an infinitely greater punishment. The hanged man continued to peep out, as it were, now from the scaffold, now from the path by which he was being led out; I followed the group of mourners who took his corpse away, felt as if I had completely lost sight of him and came back to my book which only said, "I am not so living a thing as he was." I was reminded of one of my childhood days when my mother had, while mentioning the passing-by of a cart-load of hanged Babbar Akalis, expressed deep satisfaction at my absence from the place at that time and said, "It is good that you did not see them." There was sound logic in her statement.

CHAPTER III

CHANGING PLACES ON THE GALLOWS

THE denizens of these cells were convicted of various sort of murders. Just next to mine was a boy hardly seventeen, a typical Punjabi village- illiterate rough and plain. He did not pray as the majority of condemned prisoners did all day long. He seemed to suffer no remorse. I talked to him and learnt his story. He and his elder brother had murdered their mother. It was an incredible story, but it was true! Briefly, this is what he told me.

"We were poor village-folk. Our father died when we were little children. Our mother reared us with the meagre resources at her command, including a patch of land. She was young and good looking and fell in love with a neighbour who was also a peasant like us. There was an open scandal, and there was nobody to check our mother, we being only minor kids. Boys of the village jeered at us and made dirty remarks and our humiliation increased as we grew older. My elder brother grew of age and married. He would have attained a respectable status in society but for the blot on our name. Full two years had not gone before he became the father of two children.

"But the people held him in too much contempt to recognise his position as the head of the family. They continued to treat us as nobodies well used to their sarcastic remarks and filthy insinuations We were greatly annoyed, but we could not afford to retaliate. Too much humbled in our own eyes to consider them in the wrong, we went on bearing all insults..

"My mother and her lover continued to meet though they never did so in our presence. One day a group of old villagers called upon us and rendered solemn advice in this matter affecting our honour. They said:

"'You will not remain forever the young scamps you have been and must think like fully grown up responsible men. You should be more jealous of your honour and social position in the village. Why do you allow your mother to have illicit

relations with the neighbour? If you can't check her, you should at least induce her to marry the man according to the laws of *Shariat*.'

"This was neither a joke, nor a piece of sarcasm provocatively offered, but serious advice tendered in all good faith and earnestness without the slightest show of anger or contempt. They did not reprimand us for our failure to do anything to save our honour, nor treat us as untouchable, unfit for their society. We could yet regain our proper position in the village, they held, if we could but make our mother understand the whole situation. They hoped we could convert her to heed their view if we used our persuasive powers.

"We talked over the matter with our mother. She blushed a little at first, then the colour drained out of her face when we told her what had been disturbing our minds for long. We then asked her to mend her ways and she became very serious and at last promised to abide by our wish.

"But our exhortations had no abiding effect on her: there was only temporary embarrassment and feeling of shame. She did not put an end to her illicit love indeed, she did not make even a serious effort in do so. The same old filthy remarks were our fate whenever some young people came across us in the village or outside. We reminded our mother of her promise again and again but to no purpose.

"One day my brother and I unexpectedly returned earlier than usual from the field where we had gone to work. To our utter mortification we saw her with the neighbour in the house. This maddened us. We lost our balance and forgot that she was our mother. The neighbour ran away. We wished to drop dead on the spot The woman lay on the bed with her face concealed beneath the bed-sheet. Neither of us wanted to see that face again. My brother caught hold of a *takwa* and beheaded her with a single furious blow. Her blood ran all over the floor of the room. We were not horrified but felt relieved.

"There was a sensation in the village, but we had the approbation of them all. The police arrested us the same day and we

confessed our guilt. During the trial, it became evident to me that I was to be sentenced to transportation for life and my brother to death. He had a wife and children. The idea of his dying rent my heart. I was afraid that his young widow may be tempted or forced to tread the path that our mother had followed after the early death of our father. This dreadful idea made me tremble from head to foot. I discussed the matter with my brother. The plan in my mind was to make a confession in the court taking all the responsibility for the murder on myself. I was to deny that my brother was present at the time and tell the court that the police had implicated him falsely for the simple reason that I was a mere boy, and so the court might disbelieve the fact that I alone had committed the murder.

"I actually made this statement before the Sessions Judge, denying any complicity of my brother in the crime. He sentenced me to death and so I am here. My brother was set free and comes to see me regularly. I shall introduce him to you when he comes next."

The story of this young man's noble sacrifice greatly touched me. I met his brother, a fellow looking more simple and innocent than he. I wondered whether any crime could ever touch the purity of these souls. He remained in the cells for four months or so when the High Court changed his sentence to one of transportation for life on grounds of his tender age, he was sent to the Borstal Jail. I was happy that he was saved from the gallows.

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CHAPTER IV

"I LIKE ADVENTURE ! I LOVE LIBERTY!"

THERE was a Pathan named Rahim Gul in one of the cells, who, though treated as a condemned prisoner, was not under sentence of death. The jail authorities considered him a crazy and dangerous fellow. I met him very often but could find no madness in him though he was an extremely nervous and hot-tempered person. He would evince much interest in my ideas and show great sympathy for them. He always seemed eager to listen to what I had to say and looked the humblest of men whenever I met him. One day he said, "Being a Pathan, I like adventure and love liberty !"

Whenever an old man was to die, he would exclaim with the enthusiasm characteristic of him : "I am not unhappy at this hanging," but when a young man had to go he would remark with a rueful expression on his face: "What a pity ! Why are they going to hang such a beautiful youth ? I cannot comprehend this. They should hang me in his place. I gladly offer myself for the gallows." He was usually moved to such a degree on such occusions that he would not stop crying for hours after the execution had taken place.

Rahim Gul was sentenced to transportation for life for a murder that took place as the result of a trifling quarrel. He went mad in jail and was sent to the Mental Hospital, where he is said to have committed six more murders of different persons who came in contact with him. He was sentenced to death for these murders but the High Court gave him transportation for life instead. The hospital authorities would not admit him again, so he was a permanent occupant of a cell in this ward.

He had his jolly moods when he would sing and dance inside his cell. He could sing in a high, melodious voice and knew how to turn his permanent fetters into a wondrous instrument of music.

He was an habitual smoker but the jail laws did not permit smoking. He always felt very sore about this. One day he saw a Mohammedan warder on duty puffing a cigarette and enquired of him :

"Are you a Momin or a Kaffir?"

The warder, a new man in service, replied with a show of humility, "A Momin."

"No, you are a Kaffir, worse than a Kaffir," shouted Rahim Gul angrily, adding with no less acerbity: "You go on smoking and do not invite a brother Momin ! Were you a Momin, you would never have failed to do so."

The warder was so confounded by this unexpected onslaught from his co-religionist that he presently made amends for his un-Momin-like behaviour.

One day he fell out with the doctor in charge of the ward and refused to eat his food in protest against bad medical treatment. Rahim Gul was a weak, skinny person unable to withstand the rigours of a hunger-strike and there was a risk to his life, so the doctor had to resort to forcible feeding the very next day. He brought necessary equipment for nasal feeding and stood ready to do so. Rahim Gul's avid, eager eyes fell again and again upon the feeding-cup and he questioned the doctor thus :

"How much milk will you give me ?"

"Two seers," replied the doctor.

"What else?" asked the Pathan uneasily.

"Two eggs, butter two oz., sugar four oz., and the juice of some oranges," was the pleasant information he pattered out.

"Well,it is good," declared the Pathan, adding only too wisely, "but you who were not ready to give half a seer of milk to me have brought so many things now ! Can I believe that all these things are there in the cup ?" and craning his neck to have a look at the food, he cried : "I see no trace of eggs in it. It is whiter than undiluted milk." The doctor let the suspicious Pathan have another look and assured him that it was food much richer than milk.

"Well," responded the Pathan, "do not feed me through the nose. I shall try to drink it willy-nilly by mouth!"

The doctor smiled and said, "In that case you must give up your hunger-strike."

"No hunger-strike as long as I get these things regularly," agreed Rahim Gul, with a defiant look at the medical man. The latter refused to give him milk by mouth and ordered the convict Lambardars to hold the prisoner down by force. This done, he introduced a large rubber tube into the hunger-striker's nose and fed him through it.

Forcible feeding is a painful, nerve-racking process for the prisoner, but it is a troublesome and tedious job for the doctor too. After some days the doctor made a gesture of compromise by agreeing to abandon the use of force if Rahim Gul himself took the tube into his nose. Feeding by mouth, he assured him, was not in his power unless the Superintendent permitted him to do so.

Rahim Gul, never sure about the quantity of the good things mixed in his diet, suspected the doctor of cheating him of a part of them and tried to find out the supposed trick in various ways. He would smell the liquid to make sure whether orange juice was there or not, or lick a drop or two from the rubber tube to ascertain the quantity of the sugar mixed. It was indeed hard for him to believe in the integrity of the man who had not the common sense to give half a seer of milk willingly but was ready to force more than two seers of it in addition to other costly nourishment into a weak man's stomach. The Superintendent, however, saw the reason in the argument after a period of about three weeks and promised the Pathan half a seer of milk daily, thus making him give up the hunger-strike.

Rahim Gul was locked for twenty-four hours in his cell and had never been let out even for a few minutes, but he did not seem to mind this solitary confinement, which was contrary to all jail laws, rules and regulations. One day it occurred to him that the lawful ration of two cigarettes daily had not been given to him for six days while he was under the sentence of death in these very cells.The Deputy Superintendent had in fact disallow-

ed the cigarettes lest the madman might set his bedding on fire, but he had agreed to allow them after six days. Rahim Gul now demanded the arrears, the twelve cigarettes which he had not been given several months back.

The jail authorities refused, as usual, to meet the Pathan's demand and he went on hunger-strike again. The same old process of forcible feeding started for the second time. When an official or a non-official visited the ward, the Pathan would complain about the non-supply of cigarettes and explain, "See! They don't give me my lawful ration but spend two rupees daily upon feeding me by force. They call me mad and look upon themselves as wise. Take it from me that they will come to reason at last but nobody would censure them for their foolishness."

His talk was amusing, his calculating mentality of great psychological interest and his never-failing protests against the well organised jail force illuminating. His hunger-strike came to an end when the doctor, the person most interested in the removal of the cause of an unnecessary bother, brought more than twelve cigarettes and handed than to him.

Rahim Gul died later in jail, after about two years' continuous solitary confinement.

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CHAPTER V

NOT AN ACCIDENT FOR THE THOUGHTFUL

THE comrades in Ward No. 14 (Old) entered a new phace ot existence. For three years they had lived here as under trial prisoners. Now they were convicts ; their term of imprisonment had begun. The new status brought in new relationships, conditions, restrictions and rules, adding to the authority of the jail officers and curtailing the liberty of the prisoners They did

their daily labour, and passed their days under a stricter regime of punitive law. They tried to retain,as far as possible, their rights as political prisoners.

Our brief interviews with them afforded us great joy and satisfaction. We would sit together upon blankets spread in the open courtyard of Ward No. 14 and enjoy a lively chat. They told us about the day-to-day developments in our case in the High Court as well as about their own experiences as convicts. Pandit Rupchand was fond of birds which he kept as pets, and he always came in the company of one. He had a beautiful baby squirrel too, which usually lay asleep in his pocket. It was nourished on milk soaked in a cotton pad. Comrade Krishan Lal had baptised it as "Baby Roshanlal" and he would call it aloud by this name again and again in the most quizzical manner possible. The nightingale, perched upon the shoulder of Pandit Rupchand, had no name, but this did not detract from its social position which was by no means inferior to that of the squirrel. It did not sing but this, too, did not seem to matter. One had only to offer it a bit of food on one's finger tip and it opened wide its mouth in the most charming manner.

The comrades would bring new books for us and take away old ones. We often discussed those already read by us.

Lala Sham Lal would come at times in the company of Lala Faqir Chand or alone, and then we were all called together for interview. I could see that hard times had robbed him of a part of his usual optimism. One of the comrades asked him one day what impression he was making upon the High Court Bench and he replied somewhat gravely : "Mr. Justice Daleep Singh is a judge of exceptional talent whom it is very difficult to impress unless one goes well-prepared. Mr. Justice Currie seems indifferent to whatever arguments I give; his mind is made up that the prosecution case is true. I am not sure whether I shall obtain the desired result from the appeal."

Mehta Pran Nath, a junior counsel, told us one day : "No one can predict the outcome of the cases, but one thing is certain, the police, too, are having an anxious time so far as your appeal

is concerned. Sayyad Ahmad Shah, the Deputy Seperintendent, goes barefooted every day to the shrine of Data Gunj Bux in fear of retribution he might receive for the illegalities committed by him during the investigation of the case."

The only occasion my brother and I were let out of our cells together was when someone came to see us, but we had in fact nothing much to say to each other. Our natures differed though no actual difference had ever come between us. We had no common interests so far as literature or art was concerned, and the less intellectual topics could hardly take us much further than brief, desultory conversation. Almost every prisoner in these cells was my brother's friend because he gave more time to them and less to reading of books. He had an unhesitating, straightforward method of approach which could be well described as a direct attack upon another's reserve and scruples. He could befriend a total stranger in no time, but it seemed nothing could make a deep, abiding impression upon him. He was not so considerate as generous in his dealings with men who were all friends for him without any great distinction. Never niggardly of heart, he denied no one the right to draw upon his friendship and sympathy, but there was an illusive aspect of his attachment that became obvious to the critically inclined people having close contact with him.

Each prisoner in the ward was allowed half an hour's daily walk inside the courtyard in front of his cell with his handcuffs on and the sheet-iron door shut. This was all the liberty they had. We talked to them all the time we were out of our cells. While my brother was familiar with all, I had befriended some of them though by a slow process of steady advances on both sides.

One of these was a youth by the name of Shiv belonging to the city of Lahore. He lived in Shahalmi Gate and was a broker in partnership with a man whose shop was inside Mori Gate. Himself a young man of not more than twenty-four, he believed in the good faith of his aged partner who, however, was an unscrupulous, crafty old fellow, selfish to the core. Their firm had transacted business to the extent of some thousands, the

commission on which was appropriated by the old partner over and above the head of Shiv. The documents connected with this deal were with the old man. Shiv repeatedly demanded to see them but every time the cunning fellow would make some flimsy excuse. One day he told Shiv that the papers had been given to a lawyer who was to return them within a few days. Shiv grew more and more suspicious.

Matters came to a head on the Divali day. They were in their shop inside Mori Gate. Shiv decided to have it out with his partner. He said: "This is a sacred day. I swear by God I will not mind at all if you tell me the truth about that deal. You are an old man with a family and might have needed some money. I won't mind anything; I only want to know the true facts. Why should there he any suspicion between us?"

The old man took these words of Shiv as gross insult. He flew into a rage and rushed at him with a knife in his hand to stab him. Shiv retreated in panic and caught hold of a chair. He pushed back the old man with it with such force that he staggered and fell upon his own knife (which he still held firmly in his right hand) with the full weight of his body. The knife went straight through his entrails and he was dead in a few moments.

"What an accident!" I remarked when Shiv paused in his story.

"Yes," he said with a deep sigh. He went on after a pause, "Instead of trying to conceal the matter, I rushed straight to the Anarkali Police Station and reported truthfully what had happened. They did not believe me and put me up for trial on charge of murder. Later the courts too did not believe me and I got the death sentence. I could not defend my case well because I was too poor to hire the services of an able lawyer."

His days were numbered. The High Court had rejected his appeal and now he was waiting for his end. It was terrible to think of this innocent young man going to the gallows. He had no intention of killing his partner even in self-defence. There

was no earthly reason why he should lie to me; it was obvious to me that the story he told was the unvarnished truth. Nothing now could save him, and it was impossible to believe that he could carry on deception to the point of death. We talked daily for hours. We had bound ourselves in ties of friendship. What an enormous wrong had been done to him in the name of justice! He had spoken the truth before the police because he was conversant with no law except that of his conscience, because he was humble and poor and felt he had been the cause of the death of another poor man like himself. His frankness was, it seems, a blunder; it suggested a motive for the murder-nobody need ever have known otherwise that there had ever been any dispute between them. He could have lied his way out of the situation: his truthfulness proved fatal.

Had he but a smattering of law and a bit of insight into the mentality of the custodians of law, he would never have given information that would ensure his conviction. A clever lawyer might yet have saved him through legal trickery; the only thing that was completely helpless in a court of law, it seems, was the unadorned truth. The judges had no personal hostility against him- all they did was to take a life for a life in the mistaken belief that he had taken that life. This peep into the working of the machinery of dealing our justice was indeed frightening.

He grew more pensive and vague in conversation as the days went by as if he were in deep communion with death. He would revive whenever I called at his door. "I have been waiting for you for a long while," he would usually remark with a smile on his pale lips.

"I value your friendship most," he would declare. "It is the most precious thing in my life," he would add.

"Where is your life?" was the inevitable question that echoed through my whole being but never found expression. We would talk of trifles, and I would wonder how this simple, half-educated young man could forget himself completely in this small talk, forget that death waited for him.

The burden of impending death, however, was becoming heavier and heavier for him. Left alone, he walked in his cell with light, feeble steps as if oscillating between those two strong magnets—Life and Death

At last the hour came. Ramzan, coming back after the execution, told me that Shiv was no more. This time he mentioned no details of the hanging and laid stress only on the mechanical aspect of the killing business and the organised Governmental machinery behind it. His words signified an intelligent apprehension of reality rather than of his feelings. I knew him to be discerningly cold and feelingless. He could talk about death with perfect calmness which was not consequent upon any callousness of heart, but a gift of reason.

"It is always so easy to be killed by a machine because it has no emotion, no preferences between crime and innocence, no personal animus,and is too efficient to miss its target. It wields a godlike, absolute power. Human beings, on the other hand, know nothing but to confuse and complicate matters for their fellow human beings. What do the relatives of the condemned do except make an already miserable death more miserable? Sentimentalism is the bane of our social life."

Executions were frequent. The cells vacated by the executed were occupied by those who were to be executed. These forty cells were always occupied, each one of them, as if they knew how to procure food for the gallows. Those who went caused little discouragement to those who remained. The law of life could not be reversed even where people lived exclusively under the law of death. Those who waited for death grew fonder than ever of life. Little things became great, feeble expectations turned into strong hopes, insignificant wishes grew into intense desires, souls struggled to rise from the depths once again to former heights, chests heaved to throw off the crushing burden of death, and the condemned man thought of all possible means of safety and staked all he possessed on earth on the gamble for survival. Lawyers' fees and bribes financially ruined many a family but

no one considered himself the poorer if he succeeded in obtaining a fresh lease of life in return. A man went to the gallows after reducing to beggary all whom he left behind, but another did the same without benefiting in the least from such an illuminating example. He saw the last of many a fellow-prisoner and thought and heard of death, of nothing but death, in his walking hours, and dreamt of terrible things in his dreams, but all this meant no abandonment of hope. The condemned seemed to imitate more or less the cold logic of Ramzan so far as the deaths of others were concerned.

I could not wholly escape the influence of my environment. I soon found that executions now no longer affected me the way Shiv's execution had. I no longer counted days, hours and minutes left for the departing men: "Life at all costs" was not the philosophy I could ever believe in, nor could I ever regard myself as the centre of the universe-the most important creature in existence! I was still objective enough to regard my own death with equanimity. I could see why death made some people so abject: it was so because they gave themselves exaggerated importance, because they were a little too self-centred. The sting of death was ineffective when one thought more of others and less of one's own little self. The important thing was to avoid the poison of self-importance, the virus of becoming ego-centric. Fortunately there was no such obstacle in my path. I could grow out of myself as the cause I stood for was greater than any individual. I tried to lead as normal a life as was possible under the circumstances. Unhealthy, morbid thinking creates unreasonable fears. I knew this truth and benefited by it.

Our brothers who regularly came to see us never showed the slightest anxiety about our fate. They never asked why we were, where we were, nor they even try to bring our Party-work under discussion. They knew that we were in trouble for reasons of our own, so they must help us, and that was all. Their attitude had been not a little gratifying. Other relatives also occasionally came to see us. Some of our relatives who were in Government services and others who were just afraid of the

Government never came to see us at all. They must have felt more embarrassed than ever at our death sentences. One of our near relatives came one day along with our brothers. He was a good conversationalist and talked to us at easy-in a very normal manner, as if nothing unusual had happened. He reminded me of the familiar environment of our home. It was the best attitude he could have adopted but to my great surprise Amrik Singh blurted out, "I see our relative has come for the formal offering of condolence whilst others have simply an interview with us as their objective."

The relative, a wise old man of cool temperament smiled away the sarcastic remarks. We resumed our talk as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER VI

"NO SOFT FEELINGS AND SENTIMENTS, PLEASE!"

GIRDHARI, another condemned prisoner, belonging to Hariana area, was a Jat but looked like a typical Rajput warrior. I met him every day but never found him in a depressed mood. On the first day of our acquaintance, I had asked: "What have you done ?" and his reply was:

"Someone murdered a bitch ; I did nothing."

It was about two hours after his arrival in our ward. His quaint reply, coupled with the smile on his face, puzzled me. He had made a long journey in handcuffs and fetters but there was not a trace of weariness upon his features.

I came to know him better within a few days. There was no yearning, no desire, no anxiety strong enough to upset his equanimity. He did not care for his home. His aged mother was left without any one to support her, and she had no resources of her own, but he was confident of her ability to carry

through the remainder of her life without him. There was a married woman in a neighbouring village whom he had loved and who had been in love with him. He paid frequent visits to her without fear, without any thought of danger, and perhaps without any consciousness of guilt. He told me, "I was No. 1 in the locality and no one dared challenge me for many years." He admitted having done many evil deeds during his life, and declared, "I am not a good man... but I did not murder the bitch. I loved her more than anyone else in the world."

"Why do you call her a bitch then ?" I enquired.

He repeated the words in the emphatic tone natural to him.

"Yes, Yes, the bitch."

He then looked me full in the face and added, "I say so deliberately. I did not fear anybody in the whole of the Hariana and challenged even the police... but this bitch has sent me into the condemned cell. I do not repent. Never can I say that I did not love her. The first man to note our love was her idiotic husband, but what could he do ? In a few months the whole village knew. She was a plucky lass. The jats of the village were courageous people but none dared question me. Had they taken it into their heads to kill me, they could have done so to the deep satisfaction of everybody in the village. I might have been murdered without a clue, without even a complaint being lodged with the police by anyone that such a thing had happened. The village-folk adopted the safest means of getting rid of me. They lured the bith into the open field,far from the village,and put her to death. They then reported to the police that Girdhari had been seen in the vicinity that day. The crime of murder was thus foisted upon me. They had been conspiring for long to kill both birds with one stone and their labours were crowned with success. I had committed quite a few murders but had never been arrested. They ignored the murders but could not ignore my love for a bitch. The world is sustained by truth-that is my view of it."

A strange sinner he was, with not a trace of remorse in him except the feeling that he should pay for the wrongs he had done in the past. He looked willing and resolute to the last without a nervous tremor in his iron frame.

All his appeals had been rejected within a short period. The appointed day came. I was standing in front of his cell when Ramzan came to remove the earthen pitcher and cup which are given to every prisoner inside a cell and removed on the eve of his excution lest he might, in a fit of desperation, cause an injury to himself. Girdhari had a hearty meal. Ramzan told him by way of advice, "You should not eat too much as it is better that your stomach should remain empty tomorrow."

Girdhari replied with perfect sang-froid, "I am hungry, my friend. Why should I remain so all night long ? Give me my gur also. I shall take it just now. I am also entitled to tomorrow's ration. I have no mind to go hungry on my journey to the other world . And I went to get my meal early morning so that I may enjoy it before the execution.

The imminence of death had no effect upon Girdhari's nerves. He was quite normal. I saw him looking through the iron bars of his cell-door and felt he was taking in the last glimpse of sunset in his life. Small thin clouds were visible in the patch of the sky above his head and lingering rays of the sun were playing upon them. "What were you thinking just now ?" I asked.

"I am going to be hanged because of that bitch. I do not know who killed her," he replied.

"What are your feelings?" I again asked with the idea of finding out what the frustration of love could mean to him. He replied, "I don't feel that I would die tomorrow. They will certainly hang me but I refuse to admit that this is the end of everything; the normal beating of my heart shows as if nothing is going to stop it. I am as normal as you are. Your lock-up time is approaching. Write my last letter for me !"

He placed a blank post-card in my hand and began to dictate :

"My dear mother,

I have been hanged today. I don't feel sorry. You should also not be depressed. Good wishes from me to all in the village. Well, Ram Ram, to you and the rest.

Yours loving son
Girdhari."

The date on the letter was that of his execution.

He ate his food in the morning and demanded his ration of gur too. Outside his cell, he bade a common farewell to all the prisoners and was then led away to the gallows. I could not see him because the outer doors were shut.

When Ramzan returned after the execution he exclaimed, "What a man he was! I have seen just a few like him during the time I have been here. He was up to the standard of the politicals whose execution I have witnessed."

It was Girdhari's motto that everything-and especially one's exit from this world-must be managed with good grace. He had his own peculiar way of dealing with unpleasant things : they just did not register with him as unpleasant. Thus his impending execution had no effect on him whatever. He ate, drank, slept and awoke with unabated contempt for death. He just refused to think of it, and so death had no impact on him or, maybe, his high spirits and the abundant vitality he possessed gave him the confidence that even the noose of the rope would not succeed in fully strangling life out of him. He was to die for the love of a woman but he had not an inkling of having done anything unusual of any sacrifice on his part. The charge of murder that brought him death sentence was utterly false, and yet this, too, did not seem to bother him. He was never sentimental, and he had seemed to have no illusions either about himself or the woman he loved. He did not glorify him-

self, or her, or their mutual relationship, or his own death. He used ruthless words to describe himself and her in words devoid of affection or respect-harsh, cold, cruel words, "sinner" and "bitch." He squeezed his life dry of all values except one-boldness fearlessness. intrepidity, that is why there was a challenge in his step and defiance in his eyes as he ascended the scaffold. It was not he who was meeting death but the enemy who had killed his beloved, because he himself was guilty of several murders.

The dead left behind them in these death cells memories and impressions of their period of waiting for death and of their final meeting with death. These memories haunted those who waited for the inexorable march of death. Death is a bigger show than life for the dying man and he pricks his ears and opens wide his eyes so that he might have a glimpse of the terrible path he is shortly to tread. There is always a small minority who refuse to see or understand anything. The average condemned man is resigned to his fate and goes to his death in an unostentatious way without crying or wailing. It is only the exceptional ones that show extraordinary courage or weakness. A little change of colour or voice or a slight unsteadiness in his gait is usual before he mounts the gallows, and that is how fear affects the average man.

All our relatives had come and met us except our eldest sister. Not that she did not want to meet us on the contrary, she had come from the village and she refused to go back without seeing us. Our eldest brother, however, did not think it wise to allow this meeting since he knew how sensitive and emotional she was. He was afraid she would burst into an uncontrollable fit of crying and wailing the moment she saw us, and this would cause us both pain and embarrassment. At first he tried to put her off with one excuse or the other but she persisted, so that ultimately he had to tell her the real reason.

We pleaded with our brothers to yield to her. They agreed, but before she was allowed to come it was repeatedly impressed upon her that she must not give way to tears since no amount

of crying could possibly help us and since they did not want us to repent and grieve over what we had done. They told her that it was no business of theirs to criticise our conduct and that her crying may imply that. At last they succeeded in eliciting a promise from her that she would not shed a tear, whatever happened, and that she would in no case prove a cause of disgrace to our name.

She came next week along with other members of our family. We all sat down upon blankets spread over the small courtyard before my cell. She remained seated in a corner all the while looking at both of us and uttered not a word. She was a generous old soul, affectionate and tender-hearted, and I remembered the many occasions when she had come to visit us or when I had gone to see her in her village home. She would welcome me with ecstatic joy in her eyes and would keep caressing my back with her hand while gentle words flowed out of her lips. The same kindly soul now sat subdued, overawed and mute, her changing complexion betraying the tumult in her heart. She acknowledged our greetings with an imperceptible nod of her head and sat down. It was a hard struggle, almost a torture, for her to suppress all expression of feeling. She dared not speak for the fear that she may never be allowed to see us again if she displayed any emotion-and she knew she would break down if she started speaking at all. So, she held herself aloof in spite of our efforts to draw her into conversation. She looked and looked but did not speak. Others stood up at the conclusion of the interview and so did she. She stepped out when others stepped out. Her looks showed her utter helplessness as at the moment of departure. We bade her goodbye to which she only replied with folded hands. Her ordeal was at last over.

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CHAPTER VII

THE CHALLENGE OF A FANATIC

A Nihang Sikh in one of the cells was on hunger-strike when we were admitted to the ward, this hunger strike was in protest against the sentence of death which he thought had been unjustly passed against him. His demand was that he should be acquitted. He talked little, heard little, saw little and was indifferent to those who tried to reason with him in official or non-official capacity. His fast had begun the very day the sentence was pronounced and had continued ever since. He cut himself off completely from the world and its inhabitants. He prayed all day long and for the greater part of the night and nothing that his fellow human beings said or did seemed to have any impact on him. The jail authorities naturally, could not concede his demand-in fact no body except a higher court was competent to do so. His appeal in the High Court was yet to be decided and the jail authorities did the maximum they could-they offered to write to the Judge concerned about his hunger-strike and his reasons for resorting to it. He paid no heed,however, to this offer.

He resisted forcible feeding till he was completely exhausted. Everytime they tried to force-feed him, he put up a tough and fierce struggle before they succeeded in overpowering him. He struck them with his handcuffs which were not removed from his hands at any time.

He would never take part in the shouts of 'Allah-o-Akbar,' 'Sat-Sri-Akal,' or 'Ram Ram' with which the condemned prisoners greeted one another every morning and evening. He preferred his "Path" to eating and sleeping, and regarded formalities of every sort including conversation with the officers as sheer waste of time. He was a soldier of God intent upon waging a relentless fight against the temporal authority which, according to him, had perpetrated grave injustice on him.

I would go to see him now and then. He would respond to my greetings and even talk for a few minutes on matters other than his fast and his reasons for it. He usually stood at his front door, one foot upon the floor and the other resting upon the middle horizental bar, his hands gripping two perpendicular bars. His lips moved continuously while his eyes remained closed.

I was impressed by his suffering and often thought of him and felt for him. The jail staff, the doctors, and many prisoners had tried to persuade him that the step he had taken was not necessary since it could not influence the decisions of a court. He seemed incapable of recognising any difference between the judicial authorities and the jail administration and was not willing to send even an application to the High Court stating the grounds of his innocence. He had never uttered so much as a single word in response to all the advice and suggestions given to him by various prisoners. I felt I ought to see if something could be done to alleviate his suffering during the remaining days of his captivity.

He seemed somewhat well-disposed towards me, presumably, because I was a "political" and also a Sikh. Every time I met him he would remark cordially with a simple smile upon his face:

"You are always quite all right."

I would enquire after his health but would hesitate to broach the subject of his fast which, I could see, was reducing him physically. He was so cocksure of the correctness of the step taken by him that it seemed most unlikely that he would listen to any advise. Another thought that occurred again and again to me was, why disturb his peace of mind? He is suffering from hunger, no doubt, but what does it matter whether his sentence is reprieved or not?

He would give up his leaning posture over the bars of the door, cross his hands over his chest, look at me and smile, and then after a few minutes he would grow inattentive. His thoughts were obviously elsewhere and he seemed to possess infinite endurance.

"What is the cause of your hunger-strike, Nihangji," I ventured to ask one day, for I found him in an unusually communicetive mood.

He cast a painful glance at me, closed his eyes and resumed his "Path" and that was the end of it.

I felt very sorry that I had offended him. I realised, as I stood looking at his lean, gaunt frame, that his protest was not against courts or jail but against injustice, and it was backed by all the might of God in him. My attempt to argue with him was in vain. His apparent unreasonableness was in fact greatest reason, and it left no scope for any man's words to have any meaning for him.

I apologised to him the next day and he said, "You too are like the rest."

"It was my mistake, Nihangji,!" I said humbly. His features softened perceptibly. I was happy he had forgiven me.

One day, after about three months of his hunger-strike, one of our lawyers, Amolak Ram, came along with Lala Sham Lal for a legal interview with us and told me that he had appeared in the High Court on behalf of the Nihang and that his appeal had been accepted.

The interview with us about to be over, Amolak Ram obtained permission from the Assistant Superintendent to see the Nihang, and we both went to his cell. He was standing at his door as was his wont. Amolak Ram, giving him the happy news, said, "Nihangji, I have appeared on your behalf and justice has prevailed at last. My name is Amolak Ram. The High Court has acquitted you and the orders for your release will reach in a day or two."

The Nihang indicated by a nod of his head that he had grasped what was said to him and then resumed his prayer without betraying any emotion at the news. Amolak Ram, a bit puzzled, questioned me with his eyes as to the reason of such strange behaviour on the part of his client. I told him that he had been

on hunger-strike ever since the day of his conviction, and that prayer had been his sole weapon in the fight against the injustice done to him. We again looked at him but found him the same serene, unruffled figure.

In the evening the doctor came and, going straight to his cell, cried aloud, "Sat-Sri-Akal, Nihangji! I congratulate you. God is merciful. He has done justice to you. Drink some milk, now that your demand has been met!"

The Nihang replied curtly, "I will not take any food while I am in jail,, and resumed his "Path ." The doctor had to resort to forcible feeding as usual.

His relatives came to interview him shortly afterwards and advised him to take his food and thank the Almighty, but he paid little heed to the first part of their advice and informed them that he would break his fast in the Gurdwara at Mozang.

He went out after four days without having once tasted the salt of the jail except under overpowering force.

Here was a man, I thought, who could so completely disregard external circumstances-howso ever compelling their nature. His heart was the drum that he beat incessently in praise of God, and its drum-beats drowned the gentle and persuasive voice of human reason. Death required as much careful handling as life, but he knew only one way of handling them and it was a rough, hammer-blow way! The death sentence was a complication he did not understand, he knew he was innocent, and that was enough. His way was a simple mind that refused to take into account the complicated forms that man has created to conceal truth, the devious ways invented by him to bury innocence under layers of routine. He fought till he gained his freedom, and no one could ever be able to convince him that his acquittal was not the result of his hunger-strike and of the might of Him, who gave him the strength to sustain this hunger-strike. Nothing could ever bring him any disillusionment: he was no pliant material to be moulded into a new pattern more in conson-

ance with modern relations. Death could have meant no defeat for him. The acceptance of his appeal was the most reasonable thing that ever happened to a fellow-prisoner since my coming into these cells.

CHAPTER VIII

A HALTING POINT

THERE was an old Mohammedan carpenter with a husky voice who was daily growing more incoherent, for he was in the grip of an abject terror. He would entreat a passing officer or a warder or a convict lambardar to stand awhile and listen to him. He usually told the story of his exploits in the field of masonry. He wanted to impress upon the Superintendent of the jail the fact that he would construct a splendid building for him if he would set him free. He approached everybody to intercede with the Superintendent for him.

It became evident to him, after a few weeks in the cell, that this scheme had failed to produce the desired effect, and so he hit upon another which, he thought, was calculated to be more successful. He now gave out that he had a large stock of very valuable brass utensils lying with his daughter. The Superintendent had only to save him from the gallows and then all these valuable utensils would be his !

His feeble frame shook as he talked, his drawn features betrayed panic, his beseeching eyes looked injured and he seemed quite earnest as he disclosed his schemes to all and sundry. The fever of death was causing both his mind and body to shrivel.

His day was drawing near. One day he began to complain that they had tied his daughter to the wooden frame and had given her thirty stripes of the cane. That was why, he said, she could not came to see him.

He was said to have murdered his wife in a fit of rage. A cold-blooded murder has a plan behind it, and the murderer might take long to accept failure and defeat, but he who kills in the heat of emotion without any preconceived design soon loses the "murder heat" and becomes conscious of his guilt even when there are no immediate prospects of his being brought to book. This man was not in a fit state of mind to confess after the event, but his soul was no doubt in turmoil. The misfortune was that his very looks betrayed his guilt. His youthful daughter, the sole object of his love, did not or could not come to meet him. It seemed to him, then, that the world at large had forsaken him altogether. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why he was always devising all those fantastic schemes for his escape. The constant, unrelenting strain of life in the death-cell filled his mind with terror, and thus gave rise to his mad dreams.

There was nothing to keep his mind busy, nothing that could take his mind off the idea of death and its horrors nothing that could fill the maddening void of the horror of death. He had worked hard all his life at his trade without giving conscious thought to religion. He did not know how to say his *Nimaz*—he lacked even the consolation a prayer might afford. He was very old, too old to face the ugly reality that stared him where ever he looked. He was incapable of expressing himself or venting any grievances that he might have—perhaps he lacked words even to communicate with himself or understand his own thoughts and feelings. The intense desire to live and to love, therefore, played strange tricks with him. He thought of death and of his daughter, and the rage for life found expression in his constant harping on these themes.

The jail officers did not inform him beforehand, as was the custom, of the date of his execution. They did not take out the earthen cup and pitcher on the eve of the execution lest he should die of shock. But was he capable of succumbing to a shock ? Someone shouted "Nara-i-Takbir" when he was being taken away, and all the Hindu, Mohammedan and Sikh con-

demned prisoners responded with "Alla-ho-Akbar". But he was deaf to everything. Life had become an excruciating puzzle to him, a terror before and a terror after. He was unable to tread steadily on the path that led to the gallows. The plank and the rope were, in a way, the only solid supports he secured at last. Was his execution of any use to him or to society ?

His was the most inexplicable death within my knowledge. Why was he so wretched, so ignorant, so forlorn as to be unable to bring even a single sustaining idea out of his long life ? Why was he so poorly equipped for death ? How would all those who contributed, each in his own blind way, towards his death justify his execution if they were to know the reality of his death ?

My feeling was not one of pain but of emptiness. Emotion in this case seemed to be in suspense. The bubble of an old worn out life had just burst. Abject fears, frantic but vain kicking, senseless waving of hands preceded the final act. A dull, unedifying, harmless, common-place life was the background of the final action that gave rise to these distressing cries. Would this man have had an equally empty life—and death—if he had been given education, taught the meaning of life and its values, trained to understand and express himself ? One could not help thinking that a terrible wretchedness stalked our land and enveloped millions of people, and that he was only one of the innumerable victims of the soul-less system that prevented man from achieving true humanity except as a chance gift from the gods.

A revolutionary has to take stock now and then of the forces within and without; the old man's execution was suggestive of a halting point, enjoining upon me to reassess the valuation I had placed on life. There was the immortal dream of my patriotic ambitions, of the beginning of an armed clash, the dawning of a fiery redness in the eastern horizon, the dream of victory and freedom. The fight had continued to gather momentum. The death sentence passed against me was proof

of my being in the thick of the fight. The question that I now asked myself was, "What role have I to play here or, conversely, what bearing the deaths frequently occurring around me have on my dreams, on the revolution of my conception?"

The answer was chilling enough. The uninspiring life of these unfortunate beings was a real problem. It ultimately resolved itself into the general problem of giving a full, wholesome meaning to life, of creating conditions in which no human soul would remain devoid of values as the soul of this wretched creature had been.

The turn of a Sikh Jat had come. He addressed us all thus when they took him out of his cell :

"Hindu, Muslim, Sikh brothers : There is no God. Listen all of you, there is no God, and you need not waste your time in prayers. I have thought much upon the subject and I know what I say is true. I was the staunchest believer out of the whole lot up to the last night. I was innocent and prayed to Him for full five months here, day in and day out, to give me the benefit of my innocence. I depart from you for ever. I warn you that there is no God on earth. He is only an empty name exploited by clever men in their own interests."

His voice gave way and he could speak no further. The plank beneath him gave way a few minutes later and he was dangling at the end of the rope. The believers did not like his words, but they had no chance to argue with him. Everyone, believer and non-believer, painfully waited to hear the thud of the falling plank.

There were touching reactions to his swan song. The believers clung to the name of God, their only support, closer and closer. They called to Him louder and louder to let their hearts feel the certainty of His coming to their rescue. A void was created in the hearts assailed by doubt. They felt there could be no healing of the wounds inflicted by the terrible reality of their fate and the disillusionment consequent upon it. The dying man was one of them in his last hour. He had given so

much devotion to God who had refused to respond. The wavering souls wavered all the more and fell into the imaginary lap of God. A care-free non-believer remarked, "No false hopes, no frustration."

He started me on a new line of thought. "It would have been better,, I said to myself, "If the Jat had sustained his faith in God for a few hours more and died content. Only he who has some hope how so ever faint can believe. The desperate have no use for God."

The Jat had been metamorphosed into a Bania. He demanded compensation from God for his unceasing prayers. This unimaginative outlook was the cause of his spiritual failure. He, however, had no need to conceal his reactions when he was to live no more, and tried to influence the beliefs of other prisoners in the cells.

After the execution Ramzan told me, "He was not himself, his voice had become unrecognisable. I had thought he was a courageous man."

"How could he be natural when his mainstay, his faith, had been shattered ?" I said.

The poor look to God, not because of any intellectual craving for a better and deeper understanding of Him but because they have only Him to look to. Perhaps they never think that those who fail to benefit from life fail to benefit from God as well !

CHAPTER IX

THE VALUE OF AN ILLUSION

IT had grown colder—and duller. Lack of sunshine in the cells was like lack of geniality for those confined in the cells. Clouds had been rare at first but soon enough they covered the whole sky and the state of suspense continued. We could not see the sun all day. The evening brought depressing rain. I felt as though the world had shrunk to a dark patch. My life seemed to be the vague existence of a speck. The pulse of my thoughts continued to beat without leading me anywhere. My soul today refused to be satisfied with light thoughts and vague ideas and it clamoured for clarity. I asked myself, "What is life for?"

Life is in what we think, and what we do, in the incentives and the motives I brought the past under review. It was unnecessary to tell myself what my life stood for. I thought only of the limitations that were put in the way of its defined goal. The struggle of our countrymen against slavery had set the path for me. No one had given me the lead; I led myself. The faint idea had grown into a mature desire in the process of my growth from a child to a young man. I was certain that nothing could have held me back from the path I had chosen—I had not just blundered into jail. Of course I had not deliberately sought death but I attached importance enough to my duty to realise that a deliberate death that overtook one after a life lived with will and energy and in accordance with the laws of struggle was by all means preferable to a death that struck one by chance. It was incomprehensible to me why we should not guide ourselves in a matter of such tremendous significance as death and, instead, wait for chance to inflict it upon us. These ideas were not new as they had occurred to me before on different occasions under different circumstances. I knew now that my days were numbered. I was perfectly content with my past and had no feeling of regret whatsoever, but this did not at all mean that my surroundings would not leave their impact on me. I could not help referring again and again to the thought that my ambitions had been cut short, and that active thinking, in terms of future work and progress had been brought to a stand-still.

I was no longer a dark speck but a conscious being trying to rend the cloak of surrounding darkness and ensue out of it with will and force.

The rain had narrowed the boundaries of my world and dampened my ambitions. I suffered from the suffocating lack of open atmosphere. I tried to find out the reasons for my depressed state of mind. It was not any anxiety about death nor any care about the remaining days of my life that had imperceptibly crept into my mind. It occurred to me at last that I was suffering from want of interest. I began to turn the pages of the book which had been sent to me that day. It was the *Book of Life* by Upton Sinclair, the following passage in which set my imagination aflame. I felt lifted up out of the gloom when I read:

"So I say unto you that if you want to find happiness in this life, look with distrust upon all absolutes and ultimates, all hard and fast rules; all formulas and dogmas and 'general principles'. Bear in mind that there are many complications in every human being, there are many sides to every question. Try to keep an open mind and an even temper. Try to take an interest in learning something new every day and in trying some new experiment. This is the scientific attitude towards life."

The insidious logic of the place, the lazy reflection of physical and mental environment which had crept into my consciousness, was dispelled by a vigorous stream of wholesome and refreshing thoughts. The words of another had the effect of broadening my vision in relation to various controversial issues such as patriotism, the duty of fighting the exploiters of our masses, blind hatred against imperialism, violence and the spirit of revenge, in all of which I was interested deeply. The underlying idea of seeing the many sides of a problem, of gaining experience and adding to the lights of life, proved to be the source of such valuable thought and pleasure.

"How was the murder done?" "Who committed it?" "How were such and such persons arrested?" Such were the questions asked amongst the condemned prisoners and I had been lately losing interest in the answers voiced aloud by them. The arrest

and the circumstances in which it took place were the only mishap that the majority of my neighbours recognised. This one could not dispose of the dead in a "proper" way; another boasted of having destroyed all proof of murder. A few would admit the faults in their plans. One of them talked about new devices for committing murders with absolute impunity, another counted aloud on his fingers the murders he was going to commit. The majority were rough, uncouth specimens of village life with no inclination to probe into their criminal deeds. Pent up with false pride they overlooked the degrading aspect of murder and talked glibly about the cruelties they had inflicted upon others. They lacked interest in moral questions or in self-education. I began to give more time to them and less to books.

A condemned Pathan prisoner remarked one day : "Had there been men like you with us, we would have given a smashing blow to the Government."

He had narrated to me the "heroic" tale of several dacoities he had committed. He made out that all his deeds bore great political significance. I had to labour persistently for many days in order to impress my point of view upon him. It dawned upon him at last that political work and his exploits as a dacoit of renown had little in common, and this seemed to cause him much surprise.

Faizullah was his name. The next day again I went to see him and he humbly declared, "I was on the wrong path, my friend. I am no longer proud of my evil deeds... but why could no man on earth come forward to tell me these things before?"

He was in a state of utter prostration. His past now appeared to him in an entirely new perspective, and he felt thoroughly dissatisfied with it.The only pleasure he felt was in venting all his remorse in my presence and invoking the wrath of God and man upon himself; otherwise he remained melancholy and uncommunicative.

He had only a few days more to live and I felt I had committed enormous blunder. I was very sorry. I had made him conscious of his crimes so that he was no longer content. The edifice of his vanity had been shattered, the stronghold of his will had fallen. I was responsible for transforming a self-satisfied complacent murderer, who would have looked to his death unaffected into a remorseful sinner who would now die with his soul agitated by black thoughts that would rend his heart and make him curse himself. He would no longer die happy. Did the misery of self-reproach he now suffered have any meaning in the scheme of things? Is self-realisation valuable in itself? Who knows?

Faizullah was of too generous a heart to blame me for his unhappy state of mind. He continued to take interest in my ideas till his end. He might have been a great asset to the political life of our country, had he been spared.

CHAPTER X

"DO NOT JUDGE ME BY THIS SINGLE DEED!"

"WHERE are you going?" I asked Bishan Singh, another fellow-prisoner one morning when he was being fettered in the courtyard of our ward.

"To see the world for the last time," he replied in a matter of fact tone. He was to appear in the High Court that day.

"There is no occasion for such pessimism," I said by way of encouragement, and added, "the Judges may quash your sentence as there are always flaws in such cases."

He smiled amiably and replied, "There can be no flaws in my case. I have done nothing. I mean to say that I have done nothing on my own behalf. It was all for another's sake and I only received some money for my labours."

He gave me another smile more bold and frank. I wanted to hear his story as there was yet time for him to be taken to the court and the police guard had not arrived.

He complied with my wish and recounted the tale of the murder he had committed. "I was a public man once and suffered imprisonment in the days of the Akali movement, but now I am here as a hired assassin." He went on without taking his eyes off me, "How heinous it is to murder someone without anger, without a grievance, without a real cause for enmity--and yet that is exactly what I did!"

I was a bit worried by the mood of confession fast developing in him, but his contrition had no touch of despair. There was a great difference between what he said and what he looked. He did not in the least look crest-fallen. He spoke like a man of strong will in a rare mood of frankness. He said, "I have never told the story to anyone so far, and I am giving you nothing but the unalloyed truth. This was the most degrading deed of my life. I was hard-pressed for money, but then the people all the world over are similarly hard pressed. They do not resort to murder in order to solve their financial problems. Do not judge me from this single deed. I am not a bad man by nature. The woman who gave me money was an old helpless widow. When I yielded to her request, it did not at all strike me that I was stooping to become an unprincipled hired assassin. I thought only of helping the poor widow."

Ramzan came to hundcuff him and our head-warder handed him over to the police guard.

He had been in the condemned cells for several months but had never talked to me as frankly as he did that day. His words spelt hope and confidence in the future. I wondered how he, an old political worker, could become involved in a cold-blooded murder like that?

He returned from the court in the evening. I was standing in the courtyard as he came chatting freely with the warders of the jail. He seemed to be in the best of spirits. He smiled at

me and I thought his appeal had been accepted. "Have they pronounced the judgment?" I enquired.

"They will do so in a day or two," he replied with perfect equanimity.

"So there is hope." I suggested.

He looked interestingly out of his wide-opened eyes and replied.

"The case is quite clear and the judgment is as good as pronounced. They will reject my appeal. We villagers do not give a good impression at least at first sight. My rough appearance and brusque manners were not congenial to the mind of the urbane judges."

I said nothing and he went on, "I saw my counsel, a comrade who was with me in the days of the Akali movement. He was, contrary to the spirit of his profession, very sympathetic to me during my trial. He saw me, remarked nothing, went outside and did not return to the court room."

"The role of a friend and lawyer combined was not a comfortable one for him,, I observed.

Back to his cell, under lock and key, he stood silent for a moment. I felt the idea must have come to him that he had seen the last of the free world and was now to leave it for the gallows. I was keenly surprised at his remark, "I have no regrets."

"There was no mission before me to fulfil," he went on, "I was just like the millions who have no well-defined aim. I am happy to meet you. There are only a few days more, but that does not depress me."

A condemned prisoner gets twenty-one days for mercy petition after the confirmation of his sentence by the High Court. Some file appeal in the Privy Council with the obvious purpose of prolonging their life for another two or three months but usually there is no hope left when once the High Court rejects their appeal. I had seen men whose voice had failed them when

they learnt that their appeal had been rejected. They began to count their days and could think of nothing but God and Death.

Bishan Singh was informed next day, that his appeal had been rejected. He was in good spirits and in a friendly mood. He expressed desire to be acquainted with my ideas and with the working of my Party.

I was in a practical dilemma. Could I repeat the mistake I had made in Faizullah's case? He saw my hesitation and guessed the probable reason behind it. He was sympathetic and bold like Faizullah but unlike Faizullah, he was conscious of his guilt. "Go on with your story without any hesitation. It can do no harm to me," he assured me.

"Do you believe in religoin,in *Path*?" I asked while trying to find the right opening.

He replied, "I am a believer but I am not interested in *Path* and such repetition of monotonous words. I do not think I am spiritually high enough to comfort in contemplation of the Eternal Being, but I do believe in Him. I realise that he exerts great influence over our thoughts. I am interested in your views and ideals and shall feel elated–not depressed, after hearing about them. My crime, I feel, was prompted by my baser self and has been, in face of my imminent death, already pardoned by God. I can assure you that a better man listens to what you have to say. Please go on."

His talk was of a free man, his thoughts of a fortunate soul. He slept a blessed sleep and ate normally like a healthy manual labourer. He enjoyed exceptional self-control.

I gave him as much time as could be had in the few days left to him. His interest was amazing, considering the position he was in. The last days of the condemned fly very rapidly. One does not simply wait for death, but flies towards it with all his senses aflame. Bishan Singh was fully conscious of this hastening aspect of time. He seemed to be avoiding the pull of his

heart, his limbs and muscles, with the counter-force of his will. He stood resolute and firm because he had the spirit of a brave warrior. To give in before death actually struck went against the grain.

Both his mercy petitions were rejected and I asked:

"What now?"

"Everything is happening according to my expectations. It is just as I thought it would be."

"Do you wish to die?" I asked.

"Death has been forced upon me, you know. I am prepared because there is no other way." And then he asked me. "What do you think will happen to you?"

"I have no hope whatsoever that the death sentence would be commuted," I said.

"Do you brood much over your death?" he asked me with a melancholy look in his eyes. I told him, "The idea of death comes to me but I do not let it overwhelm my thoughts. I take more interest in others than in myself whether I am alone or in the company of fellow prisoners."

Bishan Singh was not satisfied with my answer. He very wisely observed, "But the idea of death comes in the midst of thoughts about different people, between the lines of a book, between two morsels of the prisoners' bread. What are your reactions at such moments?"

I was surprised at his insight and replied with the gravity his question demanded, "The occasional thought of death has become an old habit with me ever since my arrest. I had a presentiment that I would die for a good cause, even before I had become a member of the Party. When I came into jail my first curiosity was to see the place of execution. I have always made conscious efforts to be familiar with death. I know all the details of hanging. Death by the rope is the easiest form of death as it is all over in a fraction of a minute. I shall not take it as a forced death meted out to a helpless prisoner, but as the natural and long expected culimination of my activities. I always try to think of it in an easy and care-free way."

"That is exactly the attitude we ought to adopt," he replied with evident satisfaction.

No one came to interview him, though he had a wife and many relatives. A Sub-Inspector of Police went to his village to inform the members of his family of the date of his execution, so that they might have an interview with him before it.

Only one man came—his real uncle. Stopping in front of his cell, he began to cry and shed tears. It was Bishan Singh's first and last interview. He cast a glance outside in expectation of someone else turning up but none else came. This did not upset him. His uncle cried and cried while the nephew talked as if nothing whatsoever were the matter. Then he said rather sharply, "What is the use of this outburst? Do not set a bad example before me! I am not afraid of death. I do not even believe that they will hang me. Why should I be sorry when I can't help it? There are innocent boys in these cells waiting for execution and yet they do not seem to care at all. Why weep for me? I deserve this punishment—I am a genuine murderer enough!"

Bishan Singh had asked me to be present at this interview. It was very embarrassing to stand there as a spectator of the misery and despair of a blubbering old man. I moved away a little but Bishan Singh cried aloud, "Do not go, please stay for a while more! I feel so composed because of your presence. We seem to gain courage at the very sight of each other."

I was deeply moved by his words, though I knew he was courageous enough in his own right and needed no inspiration from anyone. He went on in the same breath, "I consciously try to reflect back the good that accrues to me from you." He added after a pause, "You will he locked inside your cell in less than a couple of hours and I won't be able to see you again. Do not forget that it is my last interview with you."

His glowing words made me see him in a new light, washed clean of all darkness that had once entered his soul and had filled him with unclean thoughts of money and murder!

He enquired from his uncle about his wife,"What about Preman ? Why has she not come ?"

"Consider her to have died long ago. She no longer exists as far as you are concerned," replied the uncle pathetically.

"Tell me the truth about her," insisted Bishan Singh, adding, "I become more resolute when I see the reality."

The uncle's face betrayed an agonising suspense. The nephew persisted in his enquiry, to get at the truth .

"Your silence about her can do nothing but keep me perturbed for the few hours I have to live."

Thus prodded , the uncle told him, amidst occasional outbursts of tears, that she was quite hale and hearty and had come with him from the village to Lahore, but had then disappeared in the company of her lover whom she intended to marry.

The old man stopped short. He could, in fact, have told him nothing more terrible. I felt it was too harsh a blow for the unfortunate man, and I did not have the heart to look at his face and observe how he took the news. I slipped out of the small courtyard with a painful feeling in my heart and went inside my cell.

The uncle went away, weeping. I heard Bishan Singh call a minute or two later and went to see him. The uncle had thrown more than a bombshell in the face of the nephew but I saw no visible effects of the catastrophe upon him. He stood with his hands upon the bars of the door and told me with exceptional calmness, "I do not know why my mind even now refuses to realise that I am to be hanged tomorrow. I am blessed in this, that I experience no pangs of heart. I think my wife had settled things for herself and there is no need to be anxious about her future. Advise me whether I should bequeath half of my property to the Gurdwara in our village, leaving the other half to my uncle."

We were yet talking when the Assistant Superintendent came to write the will of Bishan Singh.

I met him again in front of my lock-up for the last time. The spirit of forgiveness in him was unmistakably genuine. He was obviously sincere when he said, "It is a great burden off my mind. In this vast world, none but Preman depended upon me, but she has been able to make arrangements for herself. After all she is human. Had I committed the murder for a good cause, I might have severely censured her conduct and felt insulted and betrayed. It is now easy for me to forgive her completely. Had she only come to see me for the last time, I would have given her my property in spite of the knowledge that she was thinking of marrying another. I would have done this good act in your presence."

He heartily shook hands with me. Neither of us betrayed emotion at this final farewell, but I knew within me that there had taken place the most difficult parting I had ever had in my life.

He immediately began to walk in his cell as I left. Very early in the morning I sent the warder on duty at my cell to convey my "Sat-Sri-Akal" to him. He sent word through the warder, "I am bathing and shall finish in a few minutes. They have taken charge of my clothes and given me the black dress to wear after the bath. It lies near me. There are also lying the ropes and the handcuffs with which they will fasten my shoulders and hands. The guard who will escort me to the scaffold is patrolling in front of the cells. There are about a hundred minutes more, but believe me, even at this moment I cannot believe that I am going to die. I cannot explain the basis of such an illusion, and can only call it a strange whim of mine. I am not a bad man and hope you would believe me. My good wishes to you! Good-bye!"

His death affected me greatly and I could think of nothing but him, his courage, his fortitude, his passion for moral and intellectual improvement. Given proper education and a healthy environment, he might never have had a criminal inclination all his life. The same could be said of the majority of the condemned prisoners. Society, I realised, had never been in

earnest about tackling the problem of crime. It provided no redeeming influence to criminals and only knew the short-cut of catching them and hanging them. The result was that the problem had gone from bad to worse. One murder brought another in its chain and vendettas prevailed where peace should have reigned. The retaliatory measures of society boomeranged. It was ridiculous to throw on overwhelming burden of responsibility upon the individual and completely absolve society which, to a great extent, moulds individuals and makes them what they are. Would society ever realise the worth of men of sterling value like Faizullah and Bishan Singh whom it throws into the dustbin under the mistaken belief that they are base coins ?

GHAPTER XI

THE MAGNETISM OF DEATH

NONE in the condemned cells could escape the questions and counter-questions regarding death. Another person might put the questions one did not ask oneself. We aroused the same interest in all that came in contact with us. Everyone who came to see us had a silent, questioning aspect about him. Our comrades, when they came to see us, carried an unexpressed anxiety about our fate in their very looks. The decision on our appeal, which was to be made known within a month or so, stimulated contemplation in our comrades, and the depth of their feelings could be gauged from the most tender consideration they showed us in even little things.

Pandit Rupchand one day asked me, "What should death mean to a revolutionary ?"

"Death for a revolutionary is synonymous with courage, courage over which reason can have no weakening influence, I replied.

Such questions were rare but they were asked and even discussed at length.

Lala Sham Lal came to meet us one day. He said, "I shall think I have won the case if there is no execution." He thought there were chances that the judges might differ and deliver separate judgments, in which case a third judge was to decide the appeal and give the final judgment. He also informed us that there was every likelihood of both the judges passing strictures against the police.

Lalaji's gout had grown more painful and his general health had greatly deteriorated. We urged upon him to try a fruit diet but the difficulty was that he would take nothing which could not be provided for all the members of his family. He,moreover, considered fruit regimen, milk diet and other suggestions of the sort as luxuries befitting the idle rich. A story among others, characteristic of him, told to us by the comrades who were on bail during our trial, was that he usually took two vegetables every morning and evening but if there was only one dish cooked some day, his wife would serve it in two dishes and Lalaji would feel quite satisfied that he had eaten two vegetables. He would not think of himself until the defence of our case was complete.

Amrik Singh was optimistic just as I was realistic. He seldom thought of any other outcome of our appeal except acquittal whereas I expected nothing but the confirmation of my capital sentence. The interview with Lalaji had raised no doubt in his mind. He talked with the comrades about his post-release programme. He was apparently unaffected by the continuous talk of death around him, though he occasionally thought of meeting his death boldly if it came, and on rare occasions even admitted that there was a slight chance against the confirmation of our sentences.

We had hardly any common friends among the condemned prisoners. One of them, a wrestler fom Baghbanpura, a suburb of Lahore, was a great friend of his. I had only casual contacts with him on rare occasions but later I came to be attached to him in bonds of friendship.

He had wrestled only in the early days of his youth and even then not as a prefessional, yet the appellation of *Pahlwan* stuck to his name because of his sinewy appearance. He was charged

with the murder of a money-lender. His wife, her mother, and her brother were also arrested in this connection. His mother-in-law was acquitted by the Sessions Court, while his wife turned approver in the case. In other words, she had given evidence against her husband, her mother and brother. The brother. Chiragh Din by name, was a college student, now under sentence of death in these cells along with his brother-in-law Aziz, the wrestler.

Aziz had borrowed and borrowed from the money-lender till the sum mounted up to a little more than a thousand rupees, when he realised that he could never repay it.

The money-lender, a cloth-hawker by occupation, visited the Pahlwan's house and demanded the return of his money. Chiragh Din happened to be there one day, on a visit to his sister, when the money-lender turned up. The *Pahlwan* told his brother-in-law, "It is good you are here by chance. We ought to finish this usurer who is constantly plaguing us with his demand." The youth agreed and the cloth-hawker was put to death a few minutes after his entry into the house.

The *Pahlwan* was neither a criminally disposed person nor a vagabond, but he had committed a heinous crime. He had many friends and relatives in the city who came to see him in jail. He was a good talker, a man of many social qualities suggestive of a non-communal bent of mind, but the good traits of his character were offset by an intrinsic weakness that could only be ill-described by the word "courageless." The murder he had committed resulted in a complete disintegration of his family and the uprooting of family traditions of loyalty, it left him bankrupt of all those filial bonds which make life worth living.

He was ashamed of his deliberate and foolish crime, and felt depressed and worried after the rejection of his appeal by the High Court. He had committed the murder because at that time the financial question had become foremost in his mind. He had committed it without thinking of the consequences. His mind had not been working in a healthy way for a long while.

He sought a way out of his oppressive environments, family worries and the like. It was like a mad man cutting his bonds with a knife. He might have had a temporary relief from the worries of life, but there was no relief for him now from the worries of death. What an unhappy man he was! He might never have been here; poverty brought him along. There are men who can think healthily even under wretched conditions, there are others who cannot. The difference can be better understood in the background of the bad living which is the lot of an average man in our country.

"There are no extenuating circumstances in my case. I have ruined the life of Chiragh Din, the budding youth who but for me would never have soiled his hands with murder. What drives me to despair is that there is not a single redeeming feature in my crime," he cried bitterly one day, in an unusually self-reproachful mood.

"There is one, for example, of poverty," I said by way of consolation. "Would you have felt an urge to murder for money's sake under better economic conditions?" I asked.

My question surprised him a bit. He found some consolation in my suggestion which I tried to make more clear to him. He evinced some interest in the social and economic conditions of our country but it was not easy for him to divert his attention fully from death to life. He had advanced too far on the road to death.

He met his end at the gallows while Chiragh Din's sentence was commuted to an imprisonment of fourteen years.

"There are men who ought to be eliminated from society," said the old chief warder of the jail to me one day. He was talking of the enormous increase of crime those days.

"There were only five condemned prisoner cells in the year 1896, when I joined service, but now these forty cells are quite insufficient and we have to lodge the remaining condemned prisoners in No. 14 (Old). Crime provokes crime, murder calls for murder, revenge breeds revenge; nor were the prisoners under our charge then so vindicative as they are nowadays," he observed.

The chief warder was about to retire. One of his duties was to attend to the execution arrangements. He had, during his long service, seen thousands of hangings, he had always dealt with crime and criminals. His words were perfectly true though they sounded strange coming from his lips. He had the appearance of an executioner ; but he was a good old man, kind at heart and mild in his dealings with prisoners.

"The laws are more brutal than men," was his parting remark.

The punitive and retributory impulses of those in power must have some wholesome check, I mused. Why does society do nothing for those delinquents who need only better environment to become good citizens ?

CHAPTER XII

SUDDEN UPSURGE OF SELF-INTEREST

THE winter had gone. It was warm again. The sun's rays fell direct on the cemented cells in summer; while in winter they peeped in for a while in the morning and in the evening, caring little for the inmates whose bodies and hearts were cold. I had seen prisoners with long hair, especially Sikhs, stand for hours to catch the slanting rays of the sun coming through the ventilator. Inadequacy of blankets and warm clothing had not been an unusual complaint because cold draughts had free access into the cells through barred doors and ventilators.

I had to discard the clothing which had become irksome because of the heat, but the mosquitoes would not let me sleep. They interfered with my studies and were more insistent callers than the warders on duty who called the condemned prisoners every three hours at night and would go on calling till each man gave proof of his being alive. You might fall ill, you

might have dozed off only a few minutes before, but the warder was bound to awake you. He might be roundly abused by an enraged prisoner, but the abuse is a sign of life and he would accept it if no other was forthcoming.

"*Bol Jawan*" and shaking of the locks continued on all night I had become used to all such noises, but not to mosquitœs. I was in fact neither keen on studies nor interested in sleep. My mind was in everything and nothing. Uncertainty about -the future was the real cause of the restlessness I was experiencing.

The judgment was expected on the 22nd of May and it was the night of the 20th. I could not feel at rest until I knew my fate for certain. I had been lately informed by our defence counsel and our comrades that there was every likelihood of our sentences being reduced. No uneasiness existed in my mind at the time of the Special Tribunals' judgment because there was no uncertainty about it. A sudden upsurge of interest in myself was for me something strange and unexpected, but nevertheless, true and real.

Our relatives and friends had gone to the High Court to hear the judgment which was expected to be pronounced before twelve o'clock. We were to be informed of it at our interview which was to take place at about one.

The Assistant Superintendent-in-charge waited in his office for our relatives and at last came to the ward when they did not come. He took his seat upon a chair in front of my cell and we began to talk. Amrik Singh also came and stood beside us.

The decision must be unfavourable, otherwise our relatives would have come, I concluded, and was annoyed at their delay in telling us the truth. Amrik Singh too seemed to have formed a similar opinion. I saw that he was perturbed. His natural optimism was not in evidence.

The Assistant Superintendent also remarked, "It is always best to be prepared for the worst." This was the wisest counsel he could give us. Three opinions concurred now, and resulted in having a lively effect upon our hitherto lagging conversation.

It was about five o'clock and there was little hope of anyone coming to see us so late.

Amrik Singh's vacillating mood, which I had seen for the first time during our stay in the condemned cells, was gone and his features showed relaxation and ease of mind. He declared in a firm and resolute voice: "The choice of the date of execution should be left to the prisoner if he is willing to be hanged earlier than the date fixed by the Government! I for myself would like no delay between the confirmation and the carrying out of the sentence."

The Assistant Superintendent remarked, laughing good-naturedly:

"Your suggestion is based no doubt on humanitarian grounds; but it is more ideal than practical."

I was in complete agreement with my brother over this. Our unanimity struck me as amusing. The idea of his death suddenly gripped my mind. Strangely enough, I had never thought of the confirmation of his sentence and had been most unreasonably optimistic about his fate, as I had been most pessimistic about mine. There was no end to my sympathy for him. The emotion that welled up all at once in me had washed away the consciousness of my being. It was not only brotherly feeling, which had never been very strong in me, but something bigger than that, signifying a unity of purpose in life and death. He talked with the Assistant Superintendent, while I communed with myself on questions personal and sublime.

The Assistant Superintendent rose to go. The warder on duty took out his bunch of keys to lock us in, when my eyes caught sight of our relatives coming to our ward. Men, women, and children swarmed into the courtyard of my cell and sat down on the ground. My flushed face seemed to be giving out sparks of smiles while our eldest brother, S. Kartar Singh, was describing in detail how they had gone to the High Court and waited for the judgment, which was delivered late. He continued to give uninteresting details without immediately telling us the real

thing. He informed us at last that Amrik Singh was acquitted. A powerful wave of joy ran through me. He then gave the names of those who had been sentenced to transportation for life. My number was sixth or seventh as the sentences were announced in alphabetical order. I knew at last that my sentence had been commuted to that of transportation for life. I would have preferred death; but the immediate feeling was not of unhappiness, firstly because of my deep-felt satisfaction at Amrik Singh's release, and secondly because of the impersonal mood I was in before the arrival of our relatives.

I began to think more clearly after they left. I had never believed in a lingering life. Old age had never been to my liking since my childhood days. I wanted to die before health, adventure, and ambition, the three pivots of life, were affected by age. The imprisonment for life was a direct contradiction of my conception of life and its principles. I could hardly adjust my mind to what had become a reality for me. The prisoner's life was an idle, helpless, beggarly life holding out nothing to live for. The world would go on moving fast while I was to be thrown like a stone into a dark corner for ever.

Amrik Singh was released on the 25th. I could not now meet and talk light-heartedly with the prisoners whose death sentences were confirmed though I had the feeling of genuine friendship for many of them. I vowed to try to bring about amelioration in the lot of the condemned prisoners whenever I got the chance. Some of them keenly felt my loss. I left the condemned prisoners' ward on the 30th of May 1934, after having remained there for about five and a half months.

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PART IV

CHAPTER I

MUCH POORER

THE small iron door of ward No. 14(Old) opened again to let me in. One or two of my comrades welcomed me and embraced me with a frenzied joy that made me realise to what an extent they had considered me as lost. I laughed and smiled and talked. Nevertheless, it was not possible for me immediately to become my former self again. I had lost the composure characteristic of a well-attuned heart. An imaginary link-up with the greatest purpose of my life had given place to a dull, vague and gloomy mental prospect. I was conscious of the trick that had been played upon me in taking away from me the initiative of death and giving me a skeleton of a life in its place. The greater part of me was still in the company of the death-awaiters with whom I had been associated for the past five and a half months. My comrades chatted with me without realising the sense of unreality and emptiness that had come to invade me. Their continued interest in me reminded of the need for a corresponding interest in them.

Death had come to be a symbol of one supreme effort for the liberation of my country. It brought a sense of fulfilment though it brought anxiety as well: It was a state of balance before one took the final, blind plunge into the fathomless. It had its concomitant of relief in that it meant the end of all responsibility It had a sort of finality about it like the last chapter of a well-written book. It left nothing to desire, for it rounded off so compeletely the story of one's endeavour for a great cause. It appeared to me that life was going to be a much poorer thing. I remembered the views of Pandit Chandrashekhar Azad about

prison life. I remembered how he always kept two loaded pistols with him so that he might die fighting and never be captured alive. His attitude was complemented by the significant words once uttered by Lala Sham Lal:

"It is easy to die, but difficult to keep up sustained effort all though one's life!"

The switch-over from death to life meant the waging of a continuous, cumbersome, meaningless struggle in captivity; the circumstances had forced upon me the duty of giving a meaning to the meaningless, a shape to the shapeless, an expression to that which had no expression. The life of a prisoner had begun for me that day.

As I lay upon my bed in the open courtyard of our ward, I could see the starry expanse and hear the broken, unrecognisable and tragically similar voices of the condemned prisoners coming from their abodes of death. They were usual lightening of the burden of their hearts by calling to one another and making stray remarks. The voices continued to reach me like sparks summing up their life and then vanishing. I recognised some of them that carried more fire.

The comrades slept early and rose early in order to be able to begin prison-labour as soon as it was given to them and finish it before the time of the morning meal. So far, they had been given the job of making envelopes but cardboards were given them to paste. It was a light *mushaqqat* (labour) though by no means clean. They finished it in about three hours, bathed and then ate their food.

In the morning I saw them doing team-work. Some folded boards, others pasted them, and a few spread them to dry in the sun. I did all type of work in order to learn the technique. The task was not a laborious one because a good many of us knew how to turn it into fun. The herd instinct was at work. There was an all-round warmth of feeling as if we had undertaken a joint enterprise and were feeling well launched into it. Hearts were knit together under the shadow of parting hanging above us.

Our appeal were decided and the jail authorities saw no reason for keeping us together after this. We could be transferred to different jails any of these days now. It was difficult to say whether once parted we would ever meet again. Each morning made us doubtful of what would happen in the evening. Increasing mutual regard made the coming separation more difficult and the companionship we were enjoying more precious. Days passed speedily because we allowed ourselves to enjoy an illusory life-time spent in joint activity. We talked of our future programme. The short-term prisoners pledged themselves to the service of the motherland. The ideology of terrorism was under constant review, more so because of the realisation of the difficulties that released terriorists would face in approaching the masses. The long-term prisoners were equipping themselves with material for future studies. I brought several new volumes of English poetry and essays in addition to Tagore's works, but would not read a single page, preferring in my greediness to go through the books other comrades had bought. The books in my possession were gone through in the same way by others. We found uncommon satisfaction in studies, in mutual discussion, and in collective labour. Life, to our wonder, had demonstrated its power of creating new values with the changing circumstances. The perspective before us, we found, seemed by no means so melancholy after all when we tried to work out the details of our future life.

My relatives and friends showed uncommon sympathy and consideration. Interviews were regularly and punctually held. One day one of my relatives could not for some reason come to see me and wrote a letter of apology. I often wondered how they would manage to be so nice to me. The letter was significant enough since it marked the beginning of a new period of our life in which the links with the outer world were to break one by one.

My relative's heart was obviously roused to pity, and his overpowering sympathy for me had blinded him so much that he could not, perhaps, realise what he was in for, how could he keep it up a

life-time? I showed the letter to Pandit Rup Chand and remarked that my relatives had allowed his compassion to make him forget the longrange view- He was amused by the contents of the letter, but he always loved an argument.

"What is this famous long-range view of yours, pray?" he asked.

"Action was our sole concern when we were free. Captivity must provoke thought of a clear and wholesome kind," I suggested.

"What did you think during your stay in the condemned cells, especially about terrorism?" he asked.

The topic had lately been the subject of continuous discussion amongst the majority of us. I had to confess that I had not thought much about it in the death cell. "We could apply the principles of terrorism to the condition outside, but it can never be raised to the status of a philosophy of life, particularly that of a long-term prisoner."

Pandit Rupchand felt I was not in a mood for discussion: but the subject of my reactions as a condemned prisoner was not yet exhausted between us and he persisted with more questions.

"What would you have told Faizullah, Bishan Singh or others like them to do if they had been released?"

The questions he asked invariably brought us back again to the subject of terrorism. We could not evade the self-analysis that circumstances had forced upon us. Terrorism was not a philosophy that could be openly preached and propagated amongst the masses. The most that could be said about it was based upon the righteous indignation of individuals best suited to act with vigour. It was essentially the creed of a select few. I did not have the heart to enlist a single member for the Party because of my instinctive reluctance to demand the extreme sacrifice of those who were nothing more than casual acquaintance; but the desire to have as many men on our side as we could was by no means lacking. The real reason behind my unwillingness was not clear to me then. It had something to do with our

method of recruitment which was to attract others by setting an example. We could take the people along with us only if we could suffer, and suffer bravely, without betraying the slightest weakness during all the stages of a revolutionary's career. The logic behind our actions was this: "Act so that others may be inspired to act similarly out of their own free well." This was the only way calculated to draw in the best into our struggle-that is' those who were capable of the extreme sacrifice.

"We thought more of death than of life, which fact alone is sufficient to explain all our action", observed Pandit Rup Chand.

"We are forced to think more and more of life : that is what I mean by taking a long-range view." I explained.

A friend of mine who had with much difficulty secured a job in a sugar mill in the United Provinces rushed to Lahore even at the risk of dismissal when he heard the news of my life sentence. He, however, knew that the jail authorities would not allow him an interview with me. A couple of days were wasted by him trying to obtain the necessary permission, which was refused as anticipated. My friend realised then that he could do nothing but return to his post. I took it as a had sign for our future contact with the outer world. All exaggerated expression of sympathy made me think more and more realistically on this score. The right way for us, we felt, was to withdraw more and more from the outside world. This desire was in response to an urge for ever greater reliance on our inner resources.

On the night of 15th June 1934, it rained continuously with unabated fury. Many of the cells were wet with showers coming through the barred ventilators. The atmosphere inside was sultry and we could not sleep. The rain stopped at about four in the morning when I came out and began to walk upon the raised platform in front of our cells. It was still dark. Suddenly the Deputy Superitendent entered the ward through the small iron-gate and began to shout merrily. "Wake up, wake up, be ready within an hour. Make haste, all of you!"

He went on shouting thus from one end to the other. I wondered whether he was ordering us to a battlefield or simply asking us to prepare for transfer to other jails, but the mood of deliverance in his tone was unmistakably clear. The jail staff had always considered us an extra burden on their minds. The Deputy continued to exhort us with waving arms and dancing legs to make haste, and went away when his Assistant arrived to carry out his instructions.

Pandit Rupchand was still fast asleep in his cell, knowing nothing about the uproar outside. I shouted to him to get up. "The big peepal tree has been washed away by rain," I told him, but he would not believe me. Other comrades arrived to confirm my news. He came out, urged by curiosity and found, to his surprise, that a heap of luggage was lying under the peepal tree. The joke was only too true. He laughed as though he were still half-asleep.

All our luggage was being taken out of the cells. We collected our books and began to pack our belongings. The officer-in-charge commended the search of our property in an over-suspicious manner common to his class. He examined every article carefully, sounded and tapped books, removed their covers and objected to our keeping those which had been already censored and passed. We had to challenge again and again his right to withhold things legally allowed. The search was finished at last ; but the dispute over the legality and illegality of things continued till he was convinced that we had nothing objectionable with us.

We had to depart at about eleven in batches of twos and threes. There was the elderly Malik Nathu Ram who would not look at any one of us full in the face for fear of bursting into tears. A word or two of affection from me would have sufficed to break the dam. He stood restless and mute with a khadi bag hung over his shoulder. He had joined the Congress when he was a mere youngster of thirteen or fourteen, had taken part in the Rawalpandi Riots of 1907 and had again shared the

sufferings of Congress men in the 1922 movement. A brave old soul he was whom no hardship nor suffering could make unhappy ; but his heart overflowed with love and sympathy for his compatriots. He bowed his head a little and went away without embracing me as others did. The younger ones parted after hearty handshakes, embraces and exchange of touching words.

By noon all were gone except four of us, viz., Pandit Rup Chand, Malik Kundan Lal. Jahangiri Lal and-I the four "Lifers". The officer-in-charge informed us that our transfer would take place later. We thought they would send us to the Andamans and were only waiting for the completion of the arrangements in that connection. Our luggage still lay scattered in the court-yard but we did not wish to take it back into our cells. Heaps of articles such as clothes, utensils, furniture which did not belong to the Government but were our private property had to be disposed of. We requested the jail authorities to send them to an orphanage. With them went things we required daily, such as clothes and beddings-which fact became known to us only a day later.

We did not go into our cells but sat together chatting till late in the night and then went to sleep. The next day brought no transfer orders for us and we were asked to shift to the rear of the ward where condemned prisoners were kept. It was a row of ten cells all of which were vacated in order to enforce our segregation. The cells were exceptionally unclean because of the day and night locking-in of the condemned prisoners. Here were neither brick walls nor cemented floors. These mud-cells could be neither washed nor disinfected. Each of us placed his luggage in one and came out.

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CHAPTER II

THE LIMITED FEW !

WE began to lead an outdoor life as we were not yet reconciled to the idea of a transfer. We sat all day long under a peepal tree talking, reading or doing our daily labour. Day followed day, one resembling the other, and dragged on without bringing any new interest for us. No one came to our place except the Superintendent on his weekly round. We could call the jail warder on duty from the other side of the ward when required. We felt we were tending to become mute, calm, and uninteresting like the place of our confinement. We were allowed no newspapers.

A month passed before we felt like settling down. We were ordered to make tags instead of pasting boards. It was skilled labour requiring patient practice. A prisoner who knew the art was sent to teach us how to hammer down pieces of tin and fix the thread in them. The assistant officer-in-charge of the jail factory came one day to check our progress in tag-making and told us the news in private that we were to be sent to the Andamans within a month or two. This brought back the old feeling of uncertainty.

Nobody had asked us whether we wanted to go to the Andamans or not. In the case of non-political 'lifers' only those who volunteered to go there were transported. In our case no such consent was necessary-they could send us there whether we were willing or not. The choice was with the Government. We learnt there were about four hundred terrorists in the Andamans, and tried to obtain information about the conditions in which they were placed. Some ordinary prisoners had recently returned from there and the news we obtained through them was heartening. Our comrades had facilities for reading, writing and games inside jail and were allowed newspapers too. We hungered for their society, which was only too desirable in view of the cramped atmosphere of the Lahore jail where there was little chance of our being allowed to associate with any other

political or non-political prisoners. Ordinary prisoners were allowed to work for their livelihood in the penal settlement but the politicals were without any exception kept confined in the cellular jail. We also learnt of the difficulties they had to face, but the fact could not detract much from our enthusiasm to go and lead a settled life amongst the prisoners of our class.

The factory manager, an Englishman, came to see our workmanship one day. He looked carefully at the tags we had made and told us that we were improving satisfactorily. He came next day again, inspected the tags we had made and remarked that they were all right except for a little defect in the rounding of their tips. He began to check our products regularly. For five or six days he refrained from pointing out any defects. Then one day he pointed out that we were not fixing the thread of the tags exactly in the centre of the tag. He indicated, every time he pointed out a defect, that our *mushaqqat* was very good on the whole and required only minor improvements. Tag-making was tedious and took more time than cardboard pasting itself. Our fingers were bruised and swollen by inexpert handling of the pieces of tin, but the patience of the factory manager showed results in the form of the continued improvement of our work. He then asked us to increase the number of the tags we were making and gradually brought us to doing our full quota of work. What a keen observer of human nature that factory manager was ! We might have refused to co-operate, had he shown us all the defects in our work the first time. We would have refused to work, had he threatened to punish us for bad work. On occasions our work was bad and then one of us could forestall him by praising the tags we made and he would agree without hesitation that they were all right. The regrettable fact was that he was an exception, a sort of anachronism in the antiquated jail administration—a man of the future who had strayed into the past, as it were. He had come there on temporary duty and was gone after about two months. His psychological method of dealing with labouring prisoners was by no means followed by his successors.

The dull and slow march of time, and the tedium of the changeless, uninteresting life began to tell upon us. We were ignored and left alone. We could not know even if anyone had come to interview one of us and was refused permission. No news from the outside world ever leaked in to us. Months passed without any sort of incident, good or bad, big or small, agreeable or disagreeable. It was all so dull and drab, so monotonous. Life jogged along, and just nothing ever happened. It was like treading along a path which was never to change, never to end, with only the sound of our own steps audible, and nothing more ! This was a real life imprisonment indeed ! Why do they not send us to the Andamans ? We kept asking ourselves.

The Superintendent informed us one day that it was not in his power to send us there, as the decision was to be taken by the Government without any previous reference to him.

Every morning reminded us of the burden of tag-making lying upon our shoulders. We tried to be done with it as soon as possible and felt greatly relieved when it was over. We had neither any interest in the work nor in the few books in our possession already read by us. New books could not be had. The four of us had exhausted the stories we could tell one another—they had no exchange value left in them now. Our efforts to establish contact with the prisoners in the jail had so far borne no fruit.

We tried to be on familiar terms with the doctor who came on his daily round and passed by our cells to visit the prisoners in the Badmash Line, a row of cells somewhere in Ward No. 14 (old). The doctor began to stop now and then on his way thither to have a friendly word with us. He proved to be an interesting fellow and had the gift of talkativeness which we so highly valued.

He met the prisoners in the jail and helped us obtain information about the conditions in the Andamans. He would relate his experiences with prisoners and make observations about

their general character. He talked of the "Badmashes", some of whom were confined in the Badmash Line. The word "Badmash" in the terminology of prisoners means one who has the courage to defy a jail rule or challenge a prison official with or without any justification. At times the doctor would bring us some news of the outside world. He did not read the newspapers regularly but he did not lack interest in the significant happenings in the country. He also took interest in what we read and advised us to choose a single subject and make it a hobby, but the suggestion could not be put into practice for want of required books.

"How do you propose to pass your life period ?" he asked us one day.

"Our plans can be made only after reaching the Andamans." "What if they do not send you there ?" Yes, what then ? We had no answer to this inevitable question.

The only possible plan we could make was for intellectual pursuits in the Andamans in case we were ever sent there. In the meanwhile our efforts were confined to fighting monotony and pressing for necessary changes. Our replies did not seem to satisfy the garrulous little doctor. He usually asked questions so that he might himself supply the answers. Flitting from subject to subject, he invariably came to medical science wherein he stood on unassailable ground. "Why don't you do some exercise for at least four hours, two in the morning, two in the evening, walking included ?" he asked one day, exhorting us to develop strength, health, vigour and agility by following his advice. "Begin today and tell me of the effects after a week," he added zealously. He had a brave way of meeting objections. "So much time at your disposal ! O, it is such a fine idea—this physical culture programme ! Thorough chewing can compensate for inadequacy of nourishment. Any green leaves would give you the vitamins. You shall never need any medicine. Well and good ! All this medicine business is humbug, after all !"

Pandit Rupchand had some trouble with his eyes. The doctor indicated lack of vitamin A and advised him to eat greens. "Any leaves would do," he said, "even those of the *shisham* tree in your ward."

He advised us to put no faith in medicines, and related the story of vita-wheat to illustrate his point. "Vita-Wheat was advertised for long as a great invention in the medical field, as a builder of health and restorer of vitality, but was later on proved to be nothing more than whole-wheat husk baked in a special way in the oven."

The doctor was a brave little man always exhorting us to be up and doing. "What is revolution?" "Who is a revolutionary?" He would ask such questions but never waited for our answers. He wanted us to let fall a word so that he might have the excuse to utter a hundred.

He was not so unreservedly social when some prisoner from the Badmash Line called for him at night. "The prisoner was a malingerer, a rogue," he would declare on his return, and would not stop before the cell of any one of us for a friendly chat. He was a good man at heart and would not adopt the methods that were resorted to by other jail doctors for shirking night calls by the prisoners. One method adopted by doctors was to give an enema by force, whatever may be the complaint. This habit on the part of doctors, of making no distinction between genuine and faked illness was responsible for much ill-will between them and the prisoners.

One day we saw him go to the Badmash Line with a lambardar carrying the feeding apparatus, and asked, "Who is on hunger-strike?"

"An old Badmash of the worst type," he replied curtly.

CHAPTER III

RAM LAL "THE BADMASH"

WE got the story of the hunger-striker from the warders and lambardars on duty in the Badmash Line. His name was Ram Lal. He was a state subject sentenced by a State court to transportation for life and by a British-Indian court to eight years' rigorous imprisonment.

Ram Lal was a tall, lean, weakly person without any hope of ever obtaining freedom. He was given eighteen seers of wheat to grind on the morrow of his entry into this jail. The authorities as a rule give hard *mushaqqat* to newcomers and so what they did in this case was nothing exceptional, but the prisoner did not relish the idea of spending a life-time grinding wheat and so protested against such a rigorous interpretation of the law. He refused to grind even a seer. He was given gunny clothes, punishment diet, bar-fetters, and various other punishments one after the other, and at last the last weapon in the armoury of the jail officials—the cane—was employed. He was awarded thirty stripes but the Superintendent, in consideration of the weak state of health of the prisoner, had to order cessation of the punishment after the fifteenth stripe. Ram Lal would rather have died than show the slightest weakness before the Superintendent.

When they found that no weapons were of any avail against him, they put permanent handcuffs on both hands, placed him in a solitary cell and let him remain there as long as he would not yield. He slept, ate, answered the call of nature, put on his clothes and washed his iron cups with both his hands fettered. At first he was confined in the punitive cells (*Siyasat Khana*) but was later ordered to the Badmash Line. He remained in solitary confinement for about two years with the result that his already indifferent health was ruined completely. He had been under the charge of several officers one after the other but no one had succeeded in persuading him to the grinding even for a few days. Repression had made him too hard of will to be

any more amenable to persuasion. There were three or four other Badmashes in the adjoining cells, but he was never heard to talk to them. He had in fact become deaf and could not hear what other Badmashes talked amongst themselves. Life had come to mean for him an endless spell of painful silence all round. He demanded the removal of his handcuffs and a labour easier than the grinding of eighteen seers of wheat. He had disobeyed a jail law but the jail officers had gone far beyond the spirit of any civilised law in their vain attempts to break his will. Legally they could not keep any prisoner in solitary confinement for more than a week nor handcuff both his hands for more than a day. He came to know of this law without knowing how to have it enforced in his own case. Finding no other means helpful he resorted to hunger-strike, the last weapon in the armoury of a prisoner.

The doctor was afraid lest he should die of sheer weakness and informed the Superintendent of this danger. The Superintendent examined Ram Lal on the day of his weekly round and told him without a touch of pity that the Government did not care whether he lived or died and had sent him instructions not to accept the demands. The words of the Superintendent were repeated aloud by a warder, but Ram Lal evinced neither surprise nor resentment. His condition became critical on the thirteenth day of the hunger-strike, and the doctor said it was doubtful if he could keep him alive through forced feeding. The jail authorities decided at last to yield. The iron that had gripped his hands for more than two years was to be removed, but the warders' efforts to open the rusty thing with the key failed. A blacksmith was then called to force open the handcuffs. His hands were free to take a cup of milk with them and break the fast. He had won in the struggle and hoped for better treatment from the jail authorities in future.

His success in the struggle against the authorities, however, was an illusion as is generally the case with the prisoners. The simple device of transferring him to another jail despoiled him

of the fruits of a hard struggle carried on for years. What an easy thing it was for the jail authorities to give him the illusion of victory and then have him transferred to Montgomery jail, the place for habitual offenders. The instructions that went along with him ensured stern treatment by the authorities there. Another hard struggle was in store for him. We learnt later that he died.

The doctor who had always described him as "too stubborn to listen to reason" seemed very much disillusioned as he said, "They have got rid of him too soon. I had rather hoped they would now succeed in getting labour out of him."

Ram Lal was in fact not in a "stubborn" mood after the conclusion of his hunger-strike. He had reason enough to avail himself of the opportunity to enter normal prison life, but the authorities did not give him the chance. He talked of doing labour and getting out of the punishment cells. "There is nothing wrong with my ears, it is simply *Khushki*" (lack of nourishment), he had said to the doctor. The authorities, on the other hand, did not forgive him for his disobedience, and death was the last punishment he was fated to receive for breaking a jail regulation.

A short-termer could do the most difficult labour for the limited days of his caativity, but a lifer's psychology was fundamentally different. Ram Lal fought for less exacting labour than grinding because of his will to survive, but the officers had the powers to upset his plans. They defeated him at every step until he was wiped out of existence.

CHAPTER IV

SUBSTITUTES FOR REAL THINGS

THE Assistant Superintendent in charge of the jail factory stood for standard work and utilisation of full working capacity of the prisoners. He was an old acquaintance professedly sympathetic to us. "It is mere chance that I am a jail officer and not a prisoner along with you", he declared to us several times, and he would hint at his one-time revolutionary ideas in strict confidence. We knew him, however, only as a capricious sort of person, hard to judge and difficult to please. He came daily to inspect our labour but he neither criticised it nor expressed his satisfaction with it even once.

He enquired from us one day, "How do you feel here?"

"We are quite all right, but it is so monotonous."

"Try to feel settled here. You are not being sent to the Andamans."

We looked in surprise at his face while he added, "I cannot tell you any more as the matter is strictly confidential, but it is in the air in Government circles."

We knew it was no use asking him questions, for he was the sort of man who would not give one the most insignificant bit of information when asked, though on his own he might leak out the information of the greatest possible importance. He told us of his own accord, a few days afterwards, that a new ward for terrorists was under construction in the jail and we would ultimately be sent there.T he news was confirmed by other sources. We eagerly awaited the chance to belodged under special arrangements in the Terrorist Ward.

One day I was called to the jail gate for an interview with my relatives. I saw them through the iron netting sitting outside the gate. They were not called in as our officer-in-charge was not present in the office. He had sent for me and himself gone to his residence from where he had proceeded to the city on some personal business. My relatives sat for hours waiting for his

return. I requested the Deputy Superintendent to allow them to have the interview in his presence but he refused to help me in the matter, saying that no one but our officer-in-charge could conduct the interview. My relatives waited for an hour or more and then went back without seeing me.

The Deputy Superintendent could have authorised any of his subordinates to conduct the interview but he had refused to listen to my repeated protests. I brought the complaint to the notice of the Superintendent, who promised to see that our relatives were not put to such inconvenience in future, but he took no steps to ensure the carrying out of his promise. Our friends were never allowed to see us, while even near relatives were turned away on flimsy grounds. They came to realise the difficulties they had to face and naturally came seldom. With the passage of time our letters, interviews, in short, all contact with the world at large dwindled almost to nothing. An interview even if it was held once in every three months, had a substance of reality about it so long as it was a regular feature, but it altogether lost all meaning when it came to depend on the mere whim of an officer-in-charge or a sentry or a gate-keeper, all of whom possessed the authority to keep us in the dark. We could hardly know when an interview was refused or a letter withheld.

A year went by. We still loved to live an outdoor life all day. There was no arrangement for light in the cells wherein we were locked at night but this was not the main cause of our dislike for them. The place still seemed to retain some impression of the day when we bade farewell to the rest of our comrades. Time had revived our enthusiasm for studies and physical culture but it had not satisfied the desire for expansion, for better use of our energies. On the contrary, it had increased it. How could we widen our scope? How could we get our feet out of this close environment? We thought over these questions and tried to find answers to them. What was being forced upon us was the worst form of isolationalism, if one may use that term, in place of a useful, healthy social living. The prisoner is meant to speak only for himself, to solve his difficulties alone, and to exclude

himself from all social activity which might prove his interest in other prisoners living under similar helpless conditions. A police officer investigating a crime says to the suspect, "Inform me against your fellow-criminals and save yourself." His prototype, the jail officer, appeals to the same selfish trait in human nature when he advises the prisoner not to fraternise with fellow-prisoners and tempts him to remain aloof so that he may be released earlier. The laws of remission, rewards and promotions to lambardarship are based on the narrowest and the most selfish form of individualism. If a prisoner spies against another prisoner and helps the officers and himself at the cost of fellow-prisoners he is patted on the back and is regarded as playing an important part in the jail administration. Our complete segregation from the rest of the prisoners was thus not a stray instance but an essential measure in the scheme of things. We tried to break through the barrier that existed between us and the rest of the jail population, and met with some success.

We had now mastered the art of tag-making and found it an easy task—and a neat one too. It was finished in less than an hour and a half, thus affording us more leisure to be employed in useful pursuits such as reading, walking, etc. Walking had indeed gone beyond the limits of control and regularity. We left our work and began to foot the path before our cells; we rose from our studies and did the same. It was necessary in the morning as well as after the midday and evening meals, and it filled the interval between the evening and lock-up time. We discussed some subject and walking followed automatically. We heard of some news, some occurrance in the jail, and were immediately on our feet. The habit increased as our interest increased.

We were always on the lookout for some news of the outside world. One of the Assistant Superintendents, an old acquaintance, coming on his nightly round would oblige us now and them. We would lie awake at night in expectation of his visits, and he would at times regale us with nothing but jail gossip. Such jail gossip could be described as a sort of news service of prisoners,

and at times provided interesting material, but in its wider aspect it was an agency for the dissemination of strange, ridiculously exaggerated and fantastic rumours amongst the illiterate prisoners. We had, for example, told a prisoner or two of our transfer to the Andamans in the near future, and the news came back to us exaggerated out of all proportion to what we had said. More of this gossip was wishful thinking. Thus some prisoner would circulate the pleasant news of transfer of a Superintendent or a Deputy Superintendent who happened to be severe. There was a motive for floating such rumours;it was common belief amongst the prisoners that transfer was bound to take place sooner or later when such rumours were set afoot. Occasional amusement would be provided by a reported encounter between an officer and some member of his family, the jail warders usually playing the role of news-bearers from the residential quarters of the jail employees. "The Deputy's son gave a resounding blow today on the cheek of his father," said one of the warders one day.

"Why, what had happened ?" inquired the lambardar of the Badmash Line, all agog with curiosity.

The warder came out with the following story: "The Deputy's daughter-in-law was singing to the accompaniment of instrumental music when he reached home. He stood aside for a while amazed, and then began to dance and wave his hat in the air and shout. 'No need for the professional singers of Hira Mandi now. Our girls have learnt the art !' The father's hysterical outburst was silenced by a stinging slap struck with all the youthful vigour possessed by his son who seemed to have appeared from nowhere. Ha, ha, ha...."

The warder found this an opportune occasion for indulging in a general characterisation of the Deputy. The warders, too, have their grievances like the prisoners. They are a persecuted lot with small salaries and long day and night duties. They often complain that they do not get time enough to sleep. They too are searched like prisoners at the time of their coming in and going out of the jail. Theirs is the class that befriends, threatens, chastises and sympathises with prisoners, persecutes

them at the bidding of the officers, and also carries on the smuggling business for the sake of a few additional silver coins. Midway between the worlds of freedom and slavery, they seem to carry on an unenviable existence similar to that of the ill-fed, ill-clothed, illiterate masses of our country.

The Deputy Superintendent has the main responsibility for the safe custody of prisoners and maintenance of discipline among them. He wields the power and carries out the policy. The warders and the prisoners are under his direct rule. He is often back-bitten. Our Deputy Superintendent was no exception. The prisoners in the Badmash Line shouted abuse against him in the night. There was a general restlessness amongst the convict population owing to his alleged severity.

During one of his nightly rounds he heard what was said against him. Stopping before my cell he asked. "Can the abuse of the foul-mouthed rascals affect me in the least?"

I waited for a moment or two in silence and when he said nothing more I replied, "Abuse is the most objectionable method of voicing one's discontent, but you should not on that account be unsympathetic to the genuine complaints of a prisoner confined to a punishment cell."

"I do not mind such foul language at all and am never influenced by it," he declared once again.

"You can in such a dispassionate mood better investigate the causes of the discontent," I suggested.

"The jail is not meant to provide contentment. Everyone here has some genuine grievance," he remarked with a sly look and a wry smile. He was in the best of moods that day. He continued, his genial mood still holding, "I would not be getting four and twenty rupees per month if I sincerely tried to make every prisoner happy at the cost of the law." Then he patted me on the shoulder and went away.

This Deputy Superintendent, famous for his oily tongue, was no ordinary person. He could apparently disregard his position of authority altogether and talk to his subordinates in

most familiar, intimate terms. Such familiarity and chumminess, however, was a prelude to severe punishment for the victim thus favoured with intimacy. He had only to address some elderly warder as "uncle", and the poor uncle would be in panic, "Friend, O my old friend," he would say to a prisoner, and the poor prisoner would start worrying about the state of his health in the near future. The Deputy Superintendent never forgave anyone for a breach of the rules or an act of indiscipline. He was as lavish in punishment as in friendly words. I wondered what new restrictions he was thinking of imposing upon the Badmash Line prisoners when he said that their abuse could have no effect upon him.

This Deputy Superintendent had put his finger on the right spot when he had talked of the four-twenty rupees. Money, I found, was the bed-rock of all our being. It was more important than the warm blood in our veins ; it mude everybody put humanity second. I became more and more convinced that man would never really achieve humanity till he subjugated the evil power of money through socialism and made it slave for us instead of making abject slaves of us as is the case under the capitalist system.

The officers changed, and not the conditions under which the prisoners lived. But the system remained in the background whilst individuals came to the fore and gathered round themselves the feelings of resentment, hatred, revenge or revolt-feelings that should really have attached themselves to the system. The Deputy Superintendent did nothing to remove the increasing ill-feeling against him. The prisoners constantly asked themselves what they should do about him. News of disquieting nature reached us in spite of the strict censorship imposed on the "Jail gossip" of our ward. The prisoners were thinking of some drastic step. The Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent had taken drastic measures towards the enforcement of some severe regulations and had imposed new restrictions on the liberty of the prisoners.

The Assistant Superintendent in charge of the jail factory, taking his cue from his superiors, began a vigorous campaign for the improvement of prison-labour. He demanded sample *mushaqqat* from all. The best specimen of workmanship of each kind was shown to the prisoners and they were asked to produce articles of standard size and standards hape. Severe punishments were meted out to scores of them when their work did not satisfy the expectations of the Assistant Superintendent.

So many men have feeble minds; the majority of illiterate prisoners cannot manipulate even simple mechanisms. No one can feel really interested in the labour forced upon him. Add to the simpletons and the rogues, the nervous type of men who can never work well under the threat of punishment, and you get idea of labour in captivity! The Assistant Superintendent became extremely unpopular with all the labouring prisoners because he was not in a position to provide any other incentive for work except the doubtful negative "incentive" of trying to escape punishment and rough treatment.

Driven to desperation, some Sikh prisoners one day pounced upon him as he was busy inspecting their *mushaqqat*, and began to belabour him with sticks they had got hold of. An alarm was at once raised, and a large force of warders and convict lambardars armed with lathis rushed to the scene. The Sikh prisoners were mercilessly beaten and locked afterwards in solitary cells. They were flogged next day in the open space before the clock tower (*Ghanta-ghar*) of the jail.

The labouring prisoners under the charge of the Assistant Superintendent were in an extreme state of unrest. We conveyed to them the sympathies we had for their demands through a trustworthy lambardar and advised them to strike work rather than employ violence against the officer-in-charge of the factory. They did not heed our advice. A week had hardly passed when another batch of prisoners assaulted the same officer. Each one of them was beaten and locked up in a punishment-cell and next day awarded thirty strips with the cane. The prisoners, with their facilities withdrawn and liberties curtailed, were in a state

of revolt. The jail authorities, on the other hand, made no secret of their hostility and let loose all the forces of oppression and repression upon them.

Within a few days another batch of prisoners challenged the same officer on his inspection round, and slapped him. They could not beat him much because of the heavy guard which always escorted him now for his protection. This batch, too, underwent the same treatment as had been meted out to the former ones. The Superintendent, however, did not order flogging this time as he had begun to suspect a big conspiracy behind these planned acts of violence and wanted to investigate into the whole matter himself.

At about half past eleven in the night I was just preparing to go to sleep when a lambardar from the other side of the ward came running towards the Badmash Line to inform the warder on duty there that the Superintendent was coming. A minute later he stood before my cell. He showed surprise at my being awake so late, threw the light of his torch into the cell and seemed to have noted the fact that there was an illegally kept *tipai* upon which my earthen pitcher was placed, but his scrutinising gaze was only a matter of habit; he had really come for another purpose.

"Why is unending trouble going on in the jail?" he asked me after looking carefully into my cell for a while. "I want you to tell me all the facts that have anything to do with the recent happenings," he added.

I told him the difference between the man who had started us well on the task of tag-making and his successor who had done nothing but put a spoke in the running wheel of normal prison-labour. I gave him the specific instance of Ram Lal whom his subordinate officers had treated in a most unreasonable manner. I charged them with consistently and systematically poisoning his mind and keeping him grossly misinformed about the prisoner's conditions and behaviour.

He winced at the words "poisoning" and "unreasonable" but said nothing. I explained to him that enhancement of their

labour must be accompanied by some real effort at the improvement of the prisoners' food, clothing and living conditions. Long-term prisoners, especially lifers, I argued, must be made to know and feel that they would be allowed to spend the days of their imprisonment under tolerable conditions. A prisoner must have faith that he would survive his prison term and go out alive one day, and it was the duty of the prison officials not to kill that faith by refusing to treat him like a human being.

The Superintendent was evidently displeased with my line of reasoning. He observed that I was flaunting empty rhetoric in his face instead of giving him the facts. If his subordinates were to blame, he would like to know exactly where they had erred.

I said, "Officers who enforce the law in a sympathetic spirit leave a chance to the prisoners to create some facilities for themselves. The exceptional tightening of discipline witnessed in the recent past has deprived the prisoners of this chance. Even the making of complaints and requests permitted by law has been rendered difficult and that is why there is so much unrest."

"But all these measures have been adopted only because the prisoners resorted to violence against my subordinates," he argued.

His words left no doubt that he was incapable of taking an enlightened view of the events—that he was too rigid and rude—bound to go into the root cause of the trouble. "How could they he allowed to do bad labour or to do no labour at all?" he inquird. "Give me any specific instance of cruelty. Tell me exactly where they have transgressed the rules, and I shall certainly look into it."

He listened to me for more than an hour and it seemed that I had succeeded a little better this time. There could be no doubt about his sincere wish to establish peace once more in his "kingdom." I even got the impression that he knew the truth and needed no proofs of the specific allegations I had made. "I shall see what I can do," he said and went away.

The prisoners, except a small minority of them, and all the convict officers, struct work next day. In addition, they refused to eat their meals. The Superintendent,in the beginning, made no personal contact with the prisoners in order to pacify them. He was, however, forced to meet them on the third day of the strike when he discovered that use of force had miserably failed to restore discipline. He went all alone straight into the midst of the irate strikers who were shouting slogans against jail officials.

His sudden appearance caused a hush of amazement to fall on the vociferous crowd. "What are your grievances?" he asked them gently, and waited for their answer. The prisoners had never thought of putting forth their case in a cogent manner through representatives chosen by them. They were an unorganised mob that instinctively bends before the force of an assertive, dominant personality. No one came forward to explain the common viewpoint of the prisoners. They should, at least, have told the Superintendent to go and enquire first from those who had been confined to punishment cells after a thorough thrashing. But there they stood, meek and submissive, with only a few voices speaking of minor grievances of a personal nature.

The Superintendent said, "Give up violence; submit to discipline. That is the best course for you. I shall see to it that all your genuine complaints are removed if you act up to this advice," and he repeated this several times. The prisoners were placated by the lenient and persuasive attitude of the Superintendent. They had their meals and resumed work.

Thus it was that a great struggle, a heroic effort for a joint solution of their difficulties petered out so easily. We had informed them that the Superintendent was likely to come to talk to them but they had made no plan about the stand they should take before him. All that had happened was in fact a sudden and spontaneous outburst of the general feeling of resentment pent up in the minds of the prisoners. Some extremists amongst them initiated the attack and others followed the bold example set before them. The brutal corporal punishment suffered by some

led others on to further steps of a more effective nature. This meant that the sufferess enjoyed mass support and wide spread sympathy. The cessation of work and hunger-strikes were the most effective weapons and they could never have failed but for the lack of proper guidance.

The initiative was now in the hands of the jail authorities who reacted with precision and speed. Their first step was to transfer to other jails persons who had taken a leading part in the struggle. There was, on the very next day of the conclusion of the strike, none to remind the Superintendent of the promises he had made.

More thorough searches, earlier lock-up of prisoners, and a severer discipline were the bitter fruits of the hard and courageous struggle they had been carrying on for about a month. Their continuous suffering brought no relief. The Superintendent had an easy victory at a time when he was virtually prepared for a defeat.

Two points of grave significance for the prisoners emerged from the struggle. First, the authorities had no need to negotiate peace with the prisoners except as a temporary makeshift so long as they had the power to get rid of "unwanted, troublesome, unruly" elements. Secondly, the prisoners' struggle must take the form of a joint battle for the improvement of their general conditions and must never be allowed to fall to the level of revengeful deeds against individual officers responsible for harshness towards them. They can make gains only if the fight is for the improvement of the prevailing prison system which keeps them under miserable conditions. Fought with this clear-cut aim, the struggle would surely have brought permanent results, making it more and more difficult for the authorities so make any united stand against them and to parry successfully the blows of a growing revolt.

There was an evident connection between the initial outbursts of violence and the subsequent concerted step of the prisoners. I pondered more and more over the causes of their

failure. They had struggled valiantly, and given us much food for thought. What was this prison but India in miniature, showing all the problems in a closer clearer perspective? Prisoners, like the masses, were beginning to feel the urge for freedom. Tattered clothes, insufficient diet, unhealthy conditions, poverty, wretchedness, that was what they stood against. The detection of a boiled rat and vermin in their diet was not just a chance happening; it was symptomatic of the rotten state of affairs which had to be fought tooth and nail. Such happenings pointed to a malady that existed far deeper. Illegal beatings, suppression of the commonest liberties and imposition of additional irksome labour were the signs of a decrepit system which relied solely on the use of force; and this system, however decrepit, could not be overthrown by outburst of strong emotion or sporadic violence. As I pondered further, my motherland, the object of my love and veneration, rose in her resplendent greatness before me. I soared in my imagination till the "here" of this small prison was transformed into the "there" of our vast country, and the happenings that had rocked this "India in the diminutive" assumed in my eyes a deeper significance and a far wider meaning. The ills of our land were reflected with expectional vividness in this smaller prison of ours. The dark prison, which was but the smaller aspect of our vast India in foreign bondage, shed a new light on my thinking, just as eyes laden with tears blink their way into new insights. I could visualise better than ever their suffering which aroused in the hearts of the denizens of both these prisons, thoughts that may be vague and blind and violent, but that were, nevertheless, the expression of an elemental, instinctive, irrepressible urge to improvement.

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CHAPTER V

IN THE TERRORIST WARD

WE were interested very much in the news about our future "home," the new ward for terrorists as it passed through various stages of construction. The warders going round on their watch in the inner circle would tell us, as they passed by our cells, that it was being built with speed. One day we learnt that it was ready. A few days later prisoners were for the first time confined in it at night. We hoped to be there soon. Our eagerness, our curiosity and impatience increased as no orders came for us to shift there. Several terrorist comrades, all "C" class prisoners, had been sent one by one from different jails to this new ward. The authorities would give us no reason for still keeping us separate from them and only asked us to wait.

This new ward was a small jail within the bigger one, surrounded by fifteen-foot high well, totally shutting out the view of the rest of the jail. Special watch and ward arrangements in force there precluded all contact with any non-terrorist prisoner. Our "home" had several more of such disadvantages but it continued to attract us.

One evening, as we were sitting under the shade of the peepal tree before our cells, a chit came from *Ghanta-gar* containing the information that Jahangiri Lal had been placed in "C" class and was required to shift to the Terrorist Ward. So we knew the reason of our not being allowed until now to join our comrades. The Government had a plan of taking away our "B" class facilities one by one in order to remove the chances of a united protest. The "B" class status recognised by them for the past five years was not a gift from the Government but a concession wrested from unwilling hands. We knew how the mind of the bureaucracy worked, and had never had any illusions that the dignity of political prisoners depended, on the categorisation by the bureaucratic lords in their offices but not on their own ideals and sufferings.

Jahangiri Lal went first. Malik Kundan Lal and Pandit Rupchand followed a month later. I was left alone in the place for no fault of mine; the orders for keeping me in "C" class had not yet arrived. My protests against this enforced solitary confinement made the Superintendent agree to my transfer to the Terrorist Ward.

The time came to bid farewell to the place which had seen many a vicissitude in our life, the duty of doing so falling upon me, the last of all to leave. I paid a tribute to the cherished memories of my comrades whom Ward No. 14 (Old) had received together, and then let go one by one like birds from a cage. This was a sinister place; it would never allow those birds to get together again—but their happy warblings and noble notes had created a lasting illusion of happiness and never would that illusion be entirely lost. There was the usual feeling of cold comfort experienced at the moment of severing old connections and forging new links. The hope of forming new friendships and the joy of entering a new society beckoned me as I stepped out of the place. It was midday of the 17th of September 1935 when I entered the Terrorist Ward.

I saw Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and Jahangiri Lal. I saw Pandit Inderpal, our old companion, who had met me for the last time in the Guru Dutt Bhawan Library more than five years back. He was not the same lively and energetic Inderpal, but a veritable jail edition of his former self, looking strikingly thinner in his "C" class dress. None of us had suffered as much as he. He had lived through, not only our trial but his own as well; had like us, lived in the condemned cells as he, too, was sentenced to death. The sentence was later commuted by the High Court to one of transportation for life. The most difficult period in his life was that during which he had lived all alone without a chance of seeing any human being's face except that of a warder on duty in a solitary cell in the Boarstal Jail where he was confined during the period of our trial. We embraced and stood looking at each other, smiling feebly. We had so much to say to each other and yet words failed us. We had no hopes in the present nor a programme for the near future. What

was there, then, to talk of? There was time enough for chewing the cud of the past. It did not require to be told that he had to bear the brunt of the police persecution, as he had mortally offended them by not only retracting from his former statement but also by charging them with various criminal designs against the accused in our case. The imprint of his suffering was visible on him, the tragedy that had overtaken him had, as it were shaped him afresh. His marriage, his arrest, his efforts to save us but his failure even to save himself, and then the long, brooding silence of the past five years—all these events flashed through my mind in quick succession as I stood with his hands in mine.

There were several other terrorist prisoners whom I met for the first time. S. Bachint Singh and Udham Singh were Babbar Akalis from Doaba undergoing life imprisonment. There was Tika Ram "Sukhan," a socialist poet sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment for illegal possession of a pistol. S. Tara Singh and Comrade Yog Raj were two young men convicted in the Gurdaspur Conspiracy Case. Last but not least, there was the venerable figure of Mahatma Parmanand of Jhansi, a 1914 Conspiracy case prisoner who had been in jail for the past tewnty-one years, and was still unable to foresee the end of his captivity.

All these comrades were in the working-shed situated in the farthest corner of the ward. They were busy making tags and only stopped their work when the door of the shed opened to let me in. We were let out into the open when the work was finished.

In the southeast corner of the ward, just outside the working-shed, was a small patch of green field. I looked at it with a feeling of joyful surprise. "Illegal" radishes were grown there with "illegal" seeds and equally "illegal" implements and labour The jail authorities did not permit such things but the terrorists were not bound by the official interpretation of law, and their unchecked "lawlessness" in this matter had laid the foundation of our future garden. About half a dozen mulberry trees were planted in a row in front of the cells in addition to

a couple of peepal trees of spontaneous growth. An acre of land was walled in, leaving enough open space in front of the twenty cells, where the comrades walked when they were not busy. We talked and talked till the head warder-in-charge brought the evening meals.

The comrades sat in batches of two or three outside their cells and took their food in the iron cups. I went to my cell as my food had not arrived. I felt for the first time an overwhelming harassment for better class. The distinction was to end soon but I could not say whether it was to take a day, a week or a month. I thought of giving up the class voluntarily, and talked of this to my comrades who advised me to wait and not to forestall the orders of the Government. They were thinking in terms of a future struggle, and it was not considered advisable to give up voluntarily those privileges for which we would fight later.

I could remain unlocked all day and sleep outside at night. I did not avail myself of these and other "B" class facilities, and yet I was still unhappy at the distinction. The authorities could not maintain an insulting and overbearing attitude towards a "B" class prisoner but they were accustomed to riding roughshod over the sentiments of "C" class prisoners. A uniform status for all political prisoners was the only solution of our difficulties so far as the arrogant and insulting behaviour of the jail authorities was concerned, but we could accomplish little without public support. We had to create a better atmosphere and wait for a suitable opportunity for launching a campaign for raising the standard of all political prisoners. There was hardly any chance of our effecting any link with the public outside.

The ordinary convicts were not so strictly watched and suspiciously treated, but many of their advantages over us were nullified by the lack of unifying purpose amongst them. Unlike the non-politicals, there were no tell-tale lambardars created out of us, and the mechanism of rewards and punishments had scarcely any chance to operate where complete equality prevailed.

Closely knit together as we were, we were able to struggle harder and suffer more. The authorities who had not put us together for the pleasure of seeing us united, took our challenge to their autocratic powers much more seriously than they did in the case of ordinary prisoners. Perpetual strife was the result of this hostile attitude on their part. We fought because we had to create conditions for life in the "water-tight compartment" that our ward was. The older prisoners such as the Babbar Akalis and Mahatma Parmanand had the experience of living amidst non-political prisoners whom they had organised and led on numerous occasions in the past against official repression. We were to become an organised and well-disciplined body under their leadership.

About six or seven of my companions were sitting in my cell the day after my advent when my food was brought in. All of them rose in awkward haste and left the cell one by one with the exception of Mahatma Parmanand, "Take your food," he gently said after a brief spell of silence caused by the most painful embarrassment I had even felt in the society of my comrades. Why should they leave me to eat alone when all of them did so in groups of twos and threes ? The answer to the question ought to have been supplied at least by my old comrades who had but yesterday emphatically told me there could be no distinction between me and the others because of my temporary "B" class facilities.

I was deeply gratified when the Mahatma accepted the offer to sit beside me and share the meal. His lively talk bespoke a cheerful outlook on life. His all-embracing humanity was contagious. Twenly-one years of continuous jail life did not seem to have broken a single chord of goodness in his heart. The jail authorities, too, treated him with respect. "How did you get on all this time ?" I asked.

"I am perfectly healthy and have never fallen ill in jail," he replied, and added laughingly, "I am jail-proof."

His fairly good health and socially useful ideas were the only reason for his still being here. He was not released as the C.I.D. scented politics in him and feared that he would carry on political

work after his release because he still had the energy and the will to do so. The Government might have released him ten years earlier if he had been an ordinary criminal with a heinous crime to his credit !

His life was a lesson to us all whose life-terms had hardly begun.

"You have set a bad example before us," I laughed.

"No, no, you who belong to an impatient generation shall find freedom much sooner," he retorted.

"Did you not think so about yourself when you were newly imprisoned", I asked.

"What if I thought so ? Does it disprove the difference between you and me ?" he queried smilingly and added without a pause, "The way you spurn bad food, refuse to live in an unhealthy place and worry over unsuitable conditions forebodes a speedy solution of your difficulties. Times are changing fast, I say."

"And what was your method of solving your difficulties ?" I questioned.

"To eat the worst food, remain half hungry, sleep in the damp and live in the dark cells and yet think healthy thoughts. I have always been an optimist and I have never worried," he explained in his slow, deliberate way.

I was interested in thought control but not in the philosophy of renunciation his words seemed to imply. Further talks revealed that my impression was erroneous, for he did not believe in renunciation, he was a man of sound, practical sense.

He had been to scores of jails. He was in the Yeravda Jail in the days of the Congress Satyagraha movement of 1930-32, working as an instructor in the weaving factory of the jail. He wielded great influence over the prison population and had won the respect of the Congress prisoners confined there. He was happy to meet enthusiastic youths full of hopes for our country and inspired them with his cool-headedness and his abundant funds of sympathy. One day some young men told him that the 26th January, the Independence Day, was drawing near and

that the Congress prisoners were to reiterate their independence pledge and hoist the national flag on the occasion. They proposed that he should perform the flag-hoisting ceremony since he was, by common consent, the best suited man to do so. The Mahatma was not the man to lag behind or take any half-measures. He duly hoisted the tricolour upon the central building of the jail! The authorities, hitherto well pleased with his work in the factory, were infuriated and put him in a punitive cell. To their dismay they found that all the labouring prisoners in the jail struck work in sympathy with him. The officers realised what a mistake they had made in keeping him in association barracks along with ordinary convicts.

On the 24th of October the Superintendent, to my profound relief, informed me that my "B" class had been cancelled. We were unlocked immediately after his parade was over and came out into the open. I smiled at my comrades and they smiled at me. The ever lively S. Tara Singh embraced me and cried, "I am happy. The distinction was embarrassing! Come now, could you prefer a pyjama or a kachha? You know, a "C" class prisoner can't have both. I shall be glad to see you wear the same dress as our's." I remembered the day when I had donned the clothes of those condemned to death. What I now wore was the lively of the living, symbolising a life of equality, brotherhood and unceasing struggle. The struggle, in fact, carried on since the day of our entry into the jail, had now changed its character by becoming more acute. We had lost all our earlier gains and were to begin anew.

The Mahatma made a characteristic remark about the Government when he said. "They can only recognise one standard for all of us, the lowest, unless we make them realise the truth that consciously equal people can be satisfied with nothing but an equality of a progressively rising standard."

His experience about how the Government had been always forcing struggle upon political prisoners led me to question him about those in which he himself had participated. While in the Andamans, he had been awarded thirty stripes with the cane for

assaulting the chief warder of the cellular jail. The officer was a corrupt fellow always persecuting prisoners with the object of extorting money from them. He was especially brutal and insulting to political prisoners.

"He abused me and I beat him in return," said the Mahatma inadvertently laying stress on the lesser evil, the use of force.

Nearly all his comrades were out by now. Why he was still here was to an extent explained by the following event which happened in 1933, about two years earlier.

A C.I.D. Inspector came to the jail to ascertain his views and submit a report to the higher authorities who were to decide about his release.

"What do you propose to do if you were to be set free now?" he asked.

"I will work for the masses," was the Mahatma's unhesitating reply.

"Which kind of work ?" queried the officer with a sly wink.

"I will educate the masses. Our country is very backward. I will try to make the people conscious of the need for freedom from slavery," the Mahatma told him with his customary frankness.

The C.I.D. man felt no need to question him any more. He was amused at the replies already received. It is needless to say that the Mahatma was not released because of the report the officer gave to the higher authorities.

His enthusiasm about education of the masses was already productive of practical results. There were some comrades deficient in English, Urdu or Hindi, whom he helped. He would himself teach one for a fortnight or a month and then declare, "You are progressing satisfactorily and can do without me." He then chose another pupil and laboured for his educational improvement for a limited period. The urge for education was to him like the urge for freedom which, once born, goes on expanding. A man of simple habits and steadfast character like him expected the wheel of education to run smoothly after

the initial start. The Mahatma wanted every illiterate or half-educated person to depend upon self-education, just as a prisoner without resources did in the matter of many an essential requirement of decent life.

Pandit Inderpal, another enthusiastic advocate of self-education, had taught himself Persian during the long solitary life he had lived in a cell of the Borstal Jail. He kept company with Maulana Rum, Firdausi and Hafiz because there was none else to associate with him. No wonder he was always ready to repay the debt of the illustrious masters by inviting all to drink at the fountain of their knowledge. *Diwan-i-Hafiz*, the *Masnavi* or *Shahnama* exerted a bewitching influence ; the epic of humanity's progress under the banner of the hammer and sickle attracted our attention ; history and science beckoned to us with their persuasive smiles. The very sinews of our hearts, it seemed, were being renovated by a host of new invigorating ideas. Progressive influences had caught us up in their powerful surge forward.

CHAPTER VI

"SMALL, SHARP, SEARCHING EYES!"

WE all made tags daily although not one of us gave this work more than two hours a day. It was a cumbersome liability. The myopic "Sukhan" was now and then seen by the early-rising comrades to be making tags in the working-shed under the light of the electric lamp. He wanted to be done with the nasty business before the day began. It was more or less the same with everyone else. Food was distributed early in the morning, but we felt no inclination to eat with the *mushaqqat* hanging over our heads. The jail authorities wanted us to submit to their discipline and do eight hours' daily work. We carried on studies and gardening much against their wishes. A pencil or pen and ink and paper were the most objectionable

things to be possessed by a prisoner and we had to carry them upon our persons like weapons, the possession of which was a cognisable offence within the purview of the 'Arms Act' !

Our head warder-in-charge, a certain "Shah Ji" was a notorious law-maintainer. He was reported to be No, 1 in all the jails of the province in this respect. He searched our cells at all odd hours and as many times a day as he chose. Any prohibited article found in our cells was sufficient to bring about punishment upon us. Shah Ji's activities meant a serious interference in our studies and forced us to remain always on guard. We resorted to various devices in order to hoodwink him. Thus we would bury the proscribed articles in the ground or other suitable places inside or outside the cells from where we could take them out when the "all clear" was sounded. Shah Ji's main duty was to prevent any communication between us and anyone inside or outside the jail. We did our labour and did nothing to deserve punishment so that our demands for the improvement of our condition may have greater force. We learnt to come quickly to one another's help at such critical moments as of a surprise raid meant to catch us napping.

Shah Ji was a lean, lanky person, half Pathan, half Punjabi, with small, sharp, searching eyes. The Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent regarded him as a paragon of virtue, a most trustworthy and loyal servant of the Government. He seemed to have little interest beyond the bondaries of the prison, for he would hang on even when his duty hours were over. He was too ill-tempered and unsocial to find pleasure in the company of the jail employees amongst whom he lived. He had during his long association with prisoners acquired the qualities of a bird of prey. His sudden swoops on unsuspecting prisoners loitering about in the vicinity of our ward had struck terror throughout the jail. He availed himself of the fact that a prisoner is by force of circumstances a habitual breaker of jail rules. Search the person of any prisoner and you can be almost sure that you will find in his possession something else besides his clothes and food the only things allowed to him by law. A

pinch of salt or chewing-gum, a needle, a piece of thread, a pin, a rag, or any other equally harmless article can be carried about only at the risk of *peshi* (punishment). We looked through the peephole of the iron gate of our ward and found punishment ever standing guard on our habitation. To the right were a hundred punitive cells, to the left the washing-machine and shed, and in front the enclosures for habituals and the tents. We could see through the hole and see the prisoners in front of our ward moving about, sweeping or carrying on other sundry jobs, and that was all we saw of the world.

The fact that we kept unauthorised things was especially distasteful to Shah Ji because it was impossible to search our persons without the assistance of an adequate and well-organised guard of warders or convict lambardars. He had therefore to remain content with searching our cells while we were locked inside the working-shed, and searching the working-shed at leisure when we were locked inside our cells. We could not be watchful enough never to afford him the pleasure, occasionally, of detecting some "contraband" article such as an inkpot or a pencil. At times his depredations assumed the character of a veritable drive to dispossess us completely, and this in the cribbed and confined world of jail where things were rare and exceedingly difficult to get. A petty official though he was, he was the man on the spot, and so he was more important than any higher officer who could come only once or twice a week, study the situation and give necessary orders, which this loyal servant of theirs was too keen to carry out. Things vanished from our ward, even harmless articles were thrown away beyond the wall, and Shah Ji was "surprised greatly" when we remonstrated!

We were ordered to our cells and locked in whenever the news went round that the Deputy Superintendent was coming. Everyone was meant to speak for himself, standing behind the bars like the helpless prisoner that he was. The Deputy took objection to joint complaints, united demands or collective protests. His stiff-necked attitude taught us that the official mind depended for discipline in the jail on treating us as separate

units, and leaving no loopholes in the walls of separation erected between prisoner and prisoner. The aim was to create complete isolation in case of every prisoner. In one respect the officials were right. How could we come across any illegal article unless some jail employee brought it for us? The authorities naturally paid more attention to the tightening of restrictions than to the snatching of things from us provocatively.

On the *mushaqqat* (for prisoner do not have a week of seven days, their week consists of six *mushaqqats* and a Sunday), the Superintendent held his weekly parade of our ward. The parade in theory provided the prisoners an opportunity to acquaint the Superintendent with their difficulties and complaints, but in actual practice it was a pre-arranged show intended to impress upon the prisoners the might of the highest authority in the prison. He would come with an orderly holding a canopy over his head, another waving a *Chanwar* by his side and a long train of subordinate officers and lambardars following him at a respectful distance Whenever he spoke, he spoke to the tune of "I am the law!" He did not exaggerate, because in fact his word was law. We never felt inclined to speak to him unless there was a grievance or a complaint about food or clothing.

"Give him something to think about for otherwise he would think of some criticism" was another consideration regarding him that experience had taught us to bear in mind. "Why don't they change their cells every day?" he would, for instance, enquire with knitted brows, of the Assistant Superintendent in charge of our ward. His questions were connected usually with the searches of our cells and our persons and the quality and quantity of our labour. He would look at each prisoner from head to foot, send a searching glance into his cell though it might be wholly empty (all the kit being on show in the verandah outside) and move forward with a jerk of the cane in his hand. So arrogant was his attitude and so evident was his contempt for the prisoners that a prisoner would feel humiliated and injured in his self-respect even when no criticism was actually levelled against him. We all felt relieved when the parade was over. Our cells

were then unlocked and we were allowed to have our food, which was also inspected every week by the Superintendent. That day the food was always slightly better than usual. The subordinates deceived the Superintendent regarding the real quality of the food supplied to the prisoners; and he connived at this system of deception which showed utter disregard of the actual living conditions in jail. He made a show of listening to and redressing grievances. The removal of a complaint or difficulty, however, was often nothing more than eye-wash, and the solution of a problem temporary. No improvement lasted long. The bread could not be made of clean wheat and of the prescribed weight. It was well-baked only for that part of prison which the Superintendent was to visit. The vegetables could never but be overripe and unwholesome, because the best part of the garden produce went in *dalis* to officers and their friends and relatives. It was by no means unusual to discover a rag, lizards eggs, leavings of rats, or something equally dirty in the food supplied to prisoners. A rat or a lizard was, of course, rarely found. This was, however, not the case with vermin which travelled without let or hindrance all along their path from the garden to the cooking-pot.

We had been gradually extending our garden. The seeds of flowers and vegetables we had procured by smuggling. The Superintendent saw the earth going green and enquired, "Why do you sow vegetables when you can't be allowed to cook them?"

He was told that all vegetables could be eaten raw!

The day came when we had our first crop of Brinjals. No one had a matchbox. A fire was kindled by focussing sun-rays on a rag with the help of the glasses that our myopic "Sukhan" wore! The vegetables, cut with an improvised tin knife, were cooked on this myopia-produced heat in the biggest iron cup we had. It was a day of much merry-making rounded off by a feast. We did not care a rap for the rule that forbade cooking. The psychology of the tillers of the soil guided us to the best appropriation of the produce of our labour!

We had been pressing for soap and oil and reading and writing facilities. Any request made to the Superintendent was taken as an insult when not couched in the humblest terms. The only honourable method of obtaining some facility from the authorities was to procure it in spite of them and go on enjoying it until they realised the futility of persisting in their refusal. We had been reading and writing without their permission. Gardening was another illegal hobby. Oil and soap were now smuggled in small quantities. We did not conceal the articles of toilet from Shah Ji. What a misery it was to be forced to resort to subterfuge about the commonest necessities of life! The Supertendent again turned down our request for oil and soap.

"You will use the oil for cooking purposes," he objected. He had several other objections too. Jealous of his powers, he had sensed revolt in our increasing demands. To him yielding to a request had always been synonymous with weakness.

Soap could not be used as a fat. The comrade who reminded him of this fact got the prompt reply, "You don't need soap when you have no oil."

The duty of Shah Ji was changed, to our great satisfaction, because of his inability to check irregularities. He brought about his own undoing as he had been making too many reports of indiscipline in our ward. The authorities above him had naturally felt slighted, by-passed and outwitted at such alarming reports. We were in fact demanding a sort of autonomy in our little province and not complete independence as they seemed to fear.

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CHAPTER VII

SMALL THINGS BECOME GREAT !

THE new head warder searched our cells only once and that too at approximately the same time every day, but being more cautious about our safe custody he revived the practice of waking us at night. "*Bol Jawan*," he demanded of Pandit Rupchand, and shook him roughly out of his sleep. The Pandit rose only to send him reeling back with a push, demanding sternly, "Why, did you not switch on the light and satisfy yourself that I was alive ? Am I a condemned prisoner to be awakened every three hours in the night ?"

The new head warder received similar treatment from one or two others. The authorities did not pursue the matter further and so we were not disturbed any more in the night. They had, however, more effective means of retaliation such as withholding of letters and cheating us of interviews and other lawful rights, and they did not fail to employ them.

Our "House" held its meetings, elected various committees to deal with different problems which the increasing tension in our relations with the authorities had created, and unanimously decided to insist more vigorously on our rights.

"Where is the *hauz* (reservoir for water) you daily talk of?" enquired a curious warder who had been on duty here for the past week or so.

"The *hauz* is yet to be ; so far we only have a House."

He knew the meaning of the word and smiled with satisfaction. "I thought you were thinking of an underground hauz to hide your things in," said he with becoming frankness.

"You are all in a mood in which petty troubles assume alarming proportions, and this is most undesirable."

This view was opportunely expressed by Mahatma Parmanand and was shared by many others. The mood had, in fact, come to stay as a permanent condition of our existence, for prison life was, after all, but a succession of hard struggles for

comparatively insignificant gains. Here one dissipates much energy over trifles. Obstables in the path to progress persisted at every step, demanding ever-renewed effort. The crust of official indifference was impenetrable to reason. The prison administration would neither initiate nor provoke big attacks so long as it could sleep undisturbed over the legalised and well-defended misery, wretchedness and helplessness of the captives under charge. It was, therefore, inherent in the circumstances of our situation that a host of minor issues should always crop up.

Pandit Rupchand one day asked for a new earthen pitcher as his old one was broken.

"How did it break? How do I know that you did not break it deliberately? You people are always careless of Government property. Be careful in future." The head warder brought a new pitcher after all these remonstrances and exhortations. The new one he brought was filled with water. The Pandit placed it on the floor of his cell and the water began to leak out of it. The head warder, asked to bring another, angrily replied, "Am I your servant to be bothered again and again?"

"You shall have to bring another pitcher before locking me in for the night!" asserted the Pandit.

The head warder was used to dealing with prisoners too humble to stand erect in his presence. He felt affronted and shouted angrily, "It will do perfectly well: I don't see any defect in it."

The Pandit, without arguing further, threw the pitcher down on the floor. A piece or two fell at the warder's feet and his legs were wet. "I have been insulted and assaulted," shouted the warder, and went out to report to the Deputy Superintendent.

This miner quarrel had every chance of becoming a grave issue if the authorities decided to punish Pandit Rupchand. "What do you think of this matter," I asked Mahatmaji. His view was that the authorities would not create any trouble unless we took some hasty steps in advance.

Pandit Rupchand had already informed the head warder that he would not submit to the night lock-up until he was provided with a new pitcher. "The question is," I told Mahatmaji, "whether the officers will use persuasion or force. We shall have to support our comrade in the latter case."

The Mahatma confidently expressed the hope that the warder would bring a new pitcher. He was proved to be right in his assessment that the jail servants were not spoiling for a fight.

On the third day after this incident a complaint about the conduct of Pandit Rupchand was duly made by the head warder to the Superintendent when he came on parade.

"Do you allege that Rupchand deliberately broke two pitchers that were all right ?" enquired the Superintendent.

"Yes, Sir, and he broke the second by way of assaulting me."

"That would amount to wrongful wastage of Government property, but I must be convinced that the pitchers were not leaky."

"Sir, I can bring some out of the stock we have here and show you that they are all without defect." So saying he went towards the kitchen room which was used as the godown of our ward and came back within a few minutes followed by two convicts who swept our ward. They brought four pitchers which they placed upon the floor in front of Pandit Rupchand's cell.

The Superintendent looked at them and enquired, "Why did you not fill them to the brim ? I see only a small quantity of water at the bottom of each."

One of the two prisoners, a simple Pahari, was so confused by the Superintendent's attitude that he blurted out the truth, "Sir, it is not my fault. The head warder instructed me to do so."

The Superintendent said nothing but his looks unmistakably told the warder, "The mischief was yours."

The evidence of a warder or a head warder is ordinarily considered more than sufficient whenever a prisoner is accused of some misconduct, but the Superintendent refused to listen

even to the very serious charge of assault that our head warder had made before him. This was something new and unexpected in jail. The Superintendent did not ask a single question of the accused in this case and went away after finishing his round of our ward. He could easily have believed every word of his subordinate if he had wanted to, which course he avoided with much forbearance. We, of course, appreciated his dispassionate handling of the situation.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE LITERARY LEAGUE

OUR strength was increasing through the arrival, one by one, of more terrorist prisoners. Pandit Kishori Lal of the first Lahore Conspiracy case and S. Tehl Singh, one of the comrades connected with our party, had come from Montgommery Jail. S. Tehl Singh was arrested at Dharampur, a suburb of Lahore, in the company of another revolutionary comrade, Bisheshar of Rawalpindi. They had an encounter with the police when S. Tehl Singh with a pistol in his hand and Bisheshar with a knife tried to avoid arrest. A police bullet silenced Bisheshar for ever, S. Tehl Singh, terribly distressed at the death of his brave companion, did not run for safety and was arrested. He was tried and sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment.

A later addition to our society was that of Swami Hans Raj of the Suchetgarh Shooting Case. The group to which he belonged was linked with the main revolutionary Party to which all of us belonged. Kasturi Lal, one of the companions of Swami Hans Raj, was, after his arrest at Jammu, being brought by the police to Sialkot when an attempt was made to rescue him. Swami Hans Raj, Pritam Khan, Prabhu Dayal and Jagdish Chandra boarded the compartment of the train in which their comrade was being taken and at the point of pistol

demanded his freedom from the police escort. A regular fight ensued in which one of the policemen, while trying to snatch a pistol from one of the revolutionaries, was mortally wounded with a knife. Kasturi Lal was rescued but was arrested soon after by another police party travelling in another compartment of the same train. Swami Hans Raj and his three companions made good their escape but were arrested after some months and tried for murder. Pritam Khan was sentenced to death and hanged in Montgommery Jail. Swami Hans Raj got transportation for life while Kasturi Lal and Prabhu Dayal were jailed for three years each. Jagdish Chandra was still an absconder wanted by the police.

Chaudhari Sher Jung of Nahan State, a "B" class prisoner serving his sentence of ten years, was transferred to Lahore and came to our ward.

Baba Sundar Singh and Baba Kartar Singh Giani, two Babbar Akali prisoners, had also joined us. The coming of these friends, old and new, was like the gradual expanding of our little world within its fast-encircled bounds. The larger our numbers the greater the interests pursued. The place was the same, but it brightened up. The garden was the same but it blossomed forth as we gave more and more of our care and labour to it. There were men to labour when its irrigation system failed ; there were experts to give their advice when some gardening plan went wrong. All our main interests were still illegal. Another was added in the form of a Literary League, set up at the instance of Comrade Tika Ram "Sukhan." The proposal was enthusiastically seconded by Chaudhari Sher Jung. The Literary League held its first session immediately after it came into being. It was an astounding success.

Baba Kartar Singh, the gray-haired, gray-bearded Babbar Akali who seemed to have no tongue just as he had hardly any teeth, astonished us all with an excellent Punjabi couplet of which it is impossible to capture the full flavour in translation.

It was a period of inner growth characterised by a will to expand, to improve, to break the bonds of suppressed thought. The League held its meetings every week. "Sukhan" wrote an eulogy of *Chane Ki Dall* (cooked gram) because it was the only article of food he could eat with relish in jail. Pandit Inderpal described the horrible summer as seen through the eyes of one confined in a solitary cell. Pandit Rupchand's historical poems revived the agonising memory of the days of our country's downfall which had been the subject of his study during the past few months. He had only recently finished Major Basu's *Rise of Christian Power in India*; a book that filled him with "flashes of pain."

The witty S. Tara Singh and the "artistically bowed" S. Hazara Singh wrote very beautiful Punjabi poems on the glory of Nature. Chaudhary Sher Jung wrote-in Hindi, Urdu, and sometimes in English, excellent pieces of prose and poetry. I, too, produced some verse and stories mostly related to the period of my confinement as a condemned prisoner.

"Sukhan" had delicate health and was much reduced in weight. Adequate medical attention or a change in a prisoner's diet on medical grounds was not a matter of right, since it depended on the whim of the Superintendent, who was our medical officer as well.

He was, however, one day pleased to allow half a pound of milk per day for one month to "Sukhan." The occasion was a memorable one for the medical assistant, the S. A. S. in charge of our ward, who stayed behind when the Superintendent went away, and exclaimed, beaming with satisfaction, "I have tried my best and now a facility has been obtained for you."

The Socialist poet "Sukhan" whom he had addressed thus, turned towards him with an exuberant smile. "I know you had to make persistent recommendations, Doctor Sahib," he said appreciatively.

"What harm was there in letting the stomach of a good fellow feel a bit elastic and enriched," added the medical man for the benefit of other listeners. His "well-meaning" recommendations had been in fact *against* the allowance of half a pound of milk but "Sukhan" was not the man to contradict friendly professions of the doctor and offered him thanks which he did not deserve.

The goodwill shown by all the parties in "Sukhan's" case stirred the imagination of Pandit Inderpal who saw in it a befitting subject for a congratulatory poem entitled "Sukhan's Milk." The doctor's good wishes about the flexibility of his patient's stomach received special mention in the poem.

Malnutrition was ruining many a delicate stomach but gentle sentiments like those expressed by our doctor were a rare commodity in prison. A sufferer had to complain continuously and struggle hard before the Superintendent could be convinced of the need for medical attention.

Interviews were rare and so were the letters we received from outside. I had, during my imprisonment, got only a couple of letters from outside, one of which was from Lala Sham Lal. He remembered us. I did not know whether my reply ever reached him. Every right, every facility or concession in jail depended on our good behaviour. We were indeed completely cut off from the outside world, which meant that we were not yet in a position to launch a big struggle for an improvement in our living conditions because the chances of success were small until we could invite sufficient public attention to our cause. The warders who occasionally smuggled things for us were especially cautious about carrying any messages to public men and the press. The strictest control was exercised on our interviews. There was no news about the world; but no censor was ever able to deprive the prisoners of jail gossip. A tragedy of the greater magnitude that occurred in our jail formed the subject of a story which I wrote. Shorn of its emotional content, here it is in brief:

A prisoner had come back from the Andamans when his sentence of transportation for life was about to be completed.

The hope of seeing his aged mother was revived in his mind as he reached the shores of our country. She had grown blind during the long long years of waiting for the return of her son. The desire to meet her gained an added intensity from the fact that though he would see her, she would not be able to see him. The man was illiterate and so was she. The word mother, non-the-less, rang deep into the soul. He, the unfortunate son, had been the cause of her blindness. The crime he had committed was now a thing of the distant past, lost in the slow fire of suffering he had gone through himself and imposed upon his mother. He wanted to open her eyes to the happy prospects of his readmission into the society of the free. The first thing he did after coming into jail was to write a letter asking her to come and see him.

Little did he know that a jail rule lay in wait for him. He was hit unexpectedly by some stupid inhuman violation of jail routine. He was punished for smoking an unlawful cigarette or infringing some equally minor rule. He had expected the interview to take place within a few days. He waited and waited but the mother did not come. One day another prisoner belonging to his village, who was living with him in the same barrack, was called to the jail gate for an interview. "Please find out the reason why my mother has not come," he reminded him.

"What has happened to her?" he asked his companion who was looking a bit sad after his return.

"My friend, it was no fault of hers. She did come to the jail gate, but was not allowed to see you as you had recently been punished for a jail offence."

"Oh, no interview with my mother!" cried the unhappy lifer, and then held his tongue as if he had been struck by sudden terror.

He committed suicide the same night.

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CHAPTER IX

SMUGGLING AND STRUGGLING!

THE head warders of the wards were usually the same but the duties of warders were changed every month. A warder has full authority over the prisoners under his charge subject to the control which is exercised upon him by the officers superior to him. He tries to be as strict with the prisoners as the authorities are with him. He is searched at the gate when he comes in. In his turn, he may search the prisoners to his heart's content so long as he is on duty till he goes and is subjected to a thorough search at the gate. The seventeen rupees per mensem that he gets for day and night duty is hardly conducive to the high level of honesty expected of him.

A needy prisoner would naturally dislike the warder who refuses to help him in his need. The needy warders have a similar contempt for the prisoners without needs. So the smuggling business flourishes with the help of both.

A warder newly sent to our ward had three daughters and four sons to provide for in addition to his wife. He began convassing like a professional smuggler on the very first day. "I am at your service," he said again and again with all the friendliness one usually finds in men capable of taking risks for the sake of others. He became a friend within a day or two. A man with seven children to support was not to be exploited, at least not by a political prisoner like me. I refused to give him any "work" but he persisted, saying "I shall be most happy when I can prove to be of any use to you. He asked others too to give him "work." My friends and I decided to concede his request. I sent him with a chit for ten rupees to a relative's house. He brought me the money, deducting two rupees for his trouble.

"What would you buy with the remaining money?" he asked.

"Forty-eight sheets of paper, a bottle of ink, a case of bathing soap, and half a pound of hair oil," I replied.

"My little son spilled it in play," he said apologetically, while handing me the bottle he had brought. The ink bottle was more than half full and I told him I did not mind the loss. The

next time he brought twenty-two sheets of paper in place of forty-eight. He then smuggled in the soap and oil and the account was closed.

He needed rest after such back-breaking labour. "Let me have a bath," he most deservingly asked. He went to the taps with the soap and oil he had brought and came back after more than an hour's refreshing bath. The bottle of oil was more than half emptied on his head and the cake of soap rubbed off into a thin slice, but his spirits were high by virtue of the satisfaction he got from the unusual sense of physical cleanliness.

The Superintendent was on leave and his Deputy came one day on the weekly round. We were in the working-shed. The vegetables supplied to us that day were exceptionally bad. We took out of the vegetables pan a shredded, rope-like substance about a foot long which was nothing but the adhesive, fibrous part of boiled vegetables. The Deputy felt piqued and told us not to air our protests but to eat meekly the salt and bread of prison which should always be agreeble to the palate.

"It is not the question of the palate but of the *dalis* which swallow the pick of the entire garden products," put in the Babbar Akali Bachint Singh.

The Deputy was enraged and threatened us with a lathi charge if we did not show respect to his authority.

We had a lot to tell him about our experience with bullies like him. He felt a trifle unnerved and slipped out of the working-shed which was immediately locked after him. He now stood outside, vociferating about the lax discipline in our ward. He vented his ire upon our garden which was full of turnips, radishes, etc.

"Root the garden out!" thundered the Deputy Superintendent. "I shall never allow unauthorised growing of vegetables here," he told his subordinates, who effaced the garden out of existence in no time.

The Superintendent came next week and saw us. He agreed to the legalisation of our garden. As to our complaint against

the bad treatment by his deputy he said nothing, but he had given proof of his desire to compromise with us. There was now no need to smuggle seeds from outside because the Superintendent allowed them from the jail garden.

We had enough land for cultivation of flowers and vegetables but the soil was clayey, containing big bits of debris here and there. A vein of broken bricks was found running through most of the "arable land" which required hard pick-and-shovel labour for months. We rooted out worthless trees and planted fruit trees instead. There came into being, at the end of a year, a well-kept, well-groomed garden with fruit trees planted in a row in front of the twenty cells, along with beds of vegetables and flowers.

I had made the gardening work a hobby and was more interested in it than anyone else.

Meanwhile our studies and the activities of the Literary League had not suffered from lack of interest. The paucity of books was a drawback that we could make good by more literary work.

Many of us had grown weak because of poor diet. Pandit Kishori Lal, S. Hazara Singh, Pandits Inderpal and Rupchand especially had lost much weight. Rupchand had lately been suffering from bleeding piles and looked much pulled down. I. too, fell a victim to the same malady but there was no feeling of lassitude.

A change, great or small, had come over all of us. It was the result of our social life taking shape under difficult circumstances. We were in the fighting arena for days, months, and years, and had developed habits that were suited to our life. The viewpoints of the prisoners and the officials ran along different paths even when there was no active conflict between them, but we were losing our bitterness, and taking the pinpricks of unsympathetic officials attitude less and less seriously. Our minds had reached a number of general conclusions on the basis of the situation, and come to recognise that our life would always

follow a certain pattern without any striking deviations from it. The soil had begun to nourish us with its richness as if it were injecting healthy blood into our veins. Restrictions and limitations still hit us hard but the love for one another that filled our hearts eased the situation. The authorities, when they left us alone, went out of our minds and we lost ourselves in intellectual pursuits. It was, indeed, comforting to lose the sense of time and refuse to differentiate one day from another, one month from another and one year from another. The slightest intrusion from jail officers could, however, upset this unnatural peace.

The tedium of our hours of labour was relieved by friendly discussion and non-serious dissertations. Pandit Inderpal took up the cudgels on behalf of Kangra, his home district, and Sardars Tara Singh and Hazara Singh defended Gurdaspur. The history of both districts and natural phenomena as rains, floods and clouds were utilised as weapons in the wordy warfare that went on for months between the two parties. Not all were silent listeners, for intruders were not unwelcome. Things came to acquire odd meanings and strange functions. A mountain of Kangra attacked fields of Gurdaspur and the rumbling noise of thunder reached our ears. The warfare went on until the tag making was finished, but like tag-making the war, too, was resumed every day with fresh vigour. Most of us had read about socialism and studied such subjects as biology, psychology, and astronomy, to the extent that our limited condition permitted. We would exchange views upon political and social issues and express them at the weekly meeting of the Literary League. Terrorism was, to me as well as to the majority of us, no more than a bygone phase, as initial form of struggle reminiscent of the days when we had no clear conception of the mass psychology of the people of our country. A sustained struggle, in the words of Lala Sham Lal, was conducive to long-range thinking and though we never looked disparagingly on our distant past, we had, nevertheless, mentally advanced far beyond it and were confident of doing better and more substantial and far more solid work when the future re-admitted us into the society of the free.

Many an officer had come and gone, we came into contact with hundreds of warders. Another Deputy Superintendent had taken charge. It was his first visit to our ward. He had known Ch. Sher Jung in Multan jail. He now stood talking with him in front of his cell which was the second in the first row of ten. We were standing outside the second row, waiting to meet the new Deputy; but he had expected us to come to the ward-gate to receive him. He continued talking to Ch. Sher Jung, the only "B" class prisoner in our ward, and then went away without seeing us. He had felt slighted. Next day he sent word to us through the head warder-in-charge that we should sit in a line before our respective cells at the time of his visit as the rules of the "C" class prisoners stipulated and must not look like members of an irregular mob lounging about. We refused to be "disciplined" and to meet his taste in this matter. This made him still more angry. He came after a day or two and one of us, Pandit Kishori Lal complained to him about the tattered condition of his clothes.

"They are still serviceable," he replied authoritatively and wanted to search the cell of Pandit Kishori Lal. He saw a spare piece of cloth and threateningly enquired, "You agitators and mischief-makers, how dare you make unnecessary complaints while you keep unauthorised things with you?"

"I am not used to hearing such insulting remarks," said Pandit Kishori Lal coolly.

"I shall teach you to be respectful to an officer of the jail," thundered the Deputy.

"Do what you can!" retorted the Pandit.

"Speak one word more, and I shall have all of you lathi-charged here and now," cried he, seeing that many of us had gathered before Pandit Kishori Lal's cell.

"We are ready for your lathi-charge," was our calm reply.

He ordered the warders to lock us in at once and to search all the prisoners and their cells minutely.

We hid our writing materials as best as we could, and a thorough search ensued. Many inoffensive things were taken out and placed in a heap in the courtyard. The Deputy ordered them to be locked up in the vacant kitchen room and went away.

The next day was a Sunday, and they did not open our cells at all. We were not used to treating our cells as lavatories as well, nor did we feel like taking any food before we had a bath. A hunger-strike was a possibility in the mood we were in at the time. The Deputy, however, took counsel with the Superintendent and relaxed. In the evening our officer-in-charge unlocked all of us, and returned our belongings which had been taken away from us. But we refused to have our food and said that the goodwill the Deputy had shown by proxy through his assistant could mean little to us unless he apologisd for the threatening attitude he had unnecessarily adopted.

The Deputy agreed to come himself next morning, but he agreed to tender an apology only before any two of our chosen representatives and not before all of us. We agreed, and the quarrel was amicably settled, largely because of the magnanimity of his heart, as our representatives told him on behalf of us all.

We had been making two hundred tags daily. The Superintendent one day told us that he had enhanced the scale of the *mushaqqat* to three hundred every day and that we should work accordingly.

We came to know that a large number of prisoners had refused to work according to the new scale but were now gradually increasing their work under the threats of the officers. It was a monotonous, nerve-racking task and we did it solely for the sake of peaceful relations with the officers. What incentive did we have to carry on any prison-labour at all ? The lure of remission did not exist for political prisoners with sentences of transportation for life. Take the Mahatmaji's case, for instance, he had been in jail for about twenty-three years, with the lawfully earned remission of six years excluded, which meant that he had undergone about twenty-nine years of imprisonment. Why

should we yield to a torture of our nerves for nothing? With this idea in the background of our minds we held consultations amongst ourselves and decided to resist the imposition of the revised scale.

The Superintendent repeated his orders on the next parade and we told him of our lack of interest in the work and its effects upon our health, but he was not convinced by our arguments. Next time he employed mild threats and was more serious than he had hitherto been, but we had resolved not to yield. He emphatically told us, "I know you can easily double your *mushaqqat*. Many of you finish it in less than two hours and nobody does more than three hours daily. I only ask you to make a fifty per cent increase. Do it right now, or you will be dealt with according to the regulations for disobedient prisoners."

S. Bachint Singh spoke for all of us. "You know," he said, "That if we had been convinced that we ought to increase our labour we would have done so without any threats of punishment!"

"Do not talk so much," said the Superintendent angrily, and added slowly and with considered deliberation, "I have a hundred punitive cells at my disposal and can make each one of you grind eighteen seers every day!"

We knew that the Superintendent had never been impatient with us before. But he had not only the outstanding quality of patience, he was steadfast, persistent, impassive and machine-like. I had known him for the past four years and had never seen him yield to a single demand of ours unless it was in consonance with the set policy he was pursuing towards us. There was not a single instance of our suceeeding to impress upon him a viewpoint of our own. For him a prisoner was always a prisoner. His drive for increase in labour was not to stop at three hundred tags. We knew him enough to feel that he would in due time increase it to four hundred. He was not the man to stop at tags; he would increase the scale of all sorts of

labour. We had no doubt about that on the testimony of his observation that most of the prisoners did not have sufficient work to do and that they could easily double their efforts. We the politicals, did not want to set an example which all the prisoners in the jail would surely resent. The struggle against the enhanced scale was still going on, though feebly. We did not want to put a stop to it for ever. We thought of the prospect of being blamed by the prison population for bringing about more hardships on them by our acquiescence in the Superintendent's plan. It was a question of fighting for the prisoners' point of view against that of the jail authorities. The "House" had discussed the pros and cons of the matter and decided to resist ; that was why our spokesman, S. Bachint Singh, countered the Superintendent's threat to make us grind eighteen seers in the following terms :

"I have been in the punitive cells before. Do as you like. They will not fall upon our heads !"

The Superintendent knew many of us. He could not at all be sure of success if he inflicted on us the threatened punishment. But he had a bad taste in the mouth as his position as the supreme boss had been challenged. His expression became more stern and he thundered, "Stop, Bachint Singh ! I don't want you to speak, and we shall see how long you go on refusing to do the prescribed jail task !"

Mahatma Parmanand, the most peace-loving nature amongst us, could no longer hold himself back and burst out to the surprise of all, "You stealthily go to the prisoners at work in order to find many of them sitting idle. You do not feel satisfied that they have already finished their *mushaqqat*. You employ threats to make them do much more than they would willingly. And what do the prisoners gain for their added troubles ? How many of us are weak in health and have been asking for a long while for medical attention ? One of us, S. Hazara Singh, is five feet nine inches and his weight is only ninety-eight pounds ! What have you done for him ? There

are other instances—those of Pandit Kishori Lal, Rupchand and many others. Do you as a medical man advise those suffering from piles or other diseases to sit longer and suffer more ? We shall never accept that advice though you may not hesitate to offer it. None of us is going to submit to your threats !" These words of the gentle Mahatmaji came as a great unexpected blow to the highest authority in the jail. He realised that the wind was blowing against him, and felt the need for a dignified-retreat.

"Give them *Baan*, it they won't do the tags," he ordered the Deputy Superintendent, and hurriedly went out of the working shed.

In my cell at night I went over the events of the day in my mind. We were certainly capable of performing more labour than we did in spite of our grievances and our indifferent health. Our refusal was nothing but the expression of our will to assert our freedom. The Superintendent had more reason on his side, no doubt, because he was of a more calculating and deliberate disposition than any of us. But he was possessed of that absolute authority which creates nothing but terror and cowardice in the ignorant, and a blind spirit of defiance in politically conscious prisoners like us. We could never do away with our suspicions, nor rest assured that his powers were to be used for benefit of those under his despotic rule. He could put us in the wrong by being magnanimous when we expected him to be revengeful. He could impress us with his tact. But never could he inspire faith in us. We had to keep on fighting his power unless our circumstances changed. And he was in a sense right in never believing in the genuineness of our maladies and grievances.

About two hundred yards from our ward were the buildings of the Punjab Mental Hospital ; the cries of an insane woman coming from that direction interrupted my thoughts again and again. The hospital was another jail for a different category of people. The woman's plaintive shrieks continued far into the night and I could not sleep. Was she conscious of her life ?

Was she conscious of the beating of her heart ? Could any light, any ray of hope, penetrate the darkness of her soul ? She had evidently no craving for sympathy. Then why cry so much, so loud ? She had nothing but wails to offer to the world around. She inspired in me melancholy thoughts. But then a resounding cry for freedom, for life, rose out of my heart and I felt as though the whole of my past had rolled into one startling echo for my ears. It dissipated the melancholy effects upon my mind and cleared my vision for a comprehensive view. There had been a setback here and there but I had on the whole made satisfactory progress ; the spirit of a continuous forward struggle had never failed me.

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CHAPTER X

THINGS MUST CHANGE

THE year 1937 saw the advent of popular ministries in the provinces. The electorate had given their verdict in favour of the Indian National Congress whose representatives were returned to power in seven out of the eleven provinces of British India and held a single-party majority in two. The Congress was thus enabled to take the country forward on the road of independence by using the offices as a means towards bringing about better and more hopeful conditions. A new era of constitutional progress was in sight. The foreign masters were still in the saddle and the nominal reforms were but a diversion for our national movement, but the governors in the provinces gave assurances of a fair trial and the Congress ministries assumed power.

Some changes were made in jail administration. Our province also moved a bit in the right direction for the "Kolhu" and "Kharas" labours were abolished. The prisoners were allowed a daily paper, the *Statesman*. We had the privilege of learning

something of what happened in our country. It was a coveted privilege indeed. It was natural to expect better treatment for political prisoners from the so called popular minitsry.

Any event of great importance happening in the country has, as a rule, its repercussions upon the minds of the prisoners. A governor's or a minister's visit to the jail, the end of war, the inauguration of a new Parliament, the accession to the throne of a new king, or any other occasion for great public rejoicings tends to raise their hopes and sets gossip afoot. The old prisoners tell the new ones about what had happened, for example, after the end of the Great War, or at the Great Darbar of 1912, and make them imbibe the gladdening effect of large-scale jail deliverances and substantial remissions of bygone days.

In 1935 the celebration of the King's Silver Jubilee had raised great expectations.

"The *Jugni* is coming, be prepared for better luck !" one prisoner would say to another, and make a forecast about big cuts in the days of their imprisonment. Some were sure of one month's remission per year for everyone sentenced to more than a year. The jail officers helped not a little in the raising of such hopes. But the Silver Jubilee had come and gone and had brought nothing for them. One day our comrade Tika Ram "Sukhan," an albino, red of skin and grey of hair, with long flowing locks came into the jail. A prisoner seeing him go towards the *siyasat khana*, pointed him out to another prisoner, and exclaimed.

"See, friend, the *Jugni* has come !"

The psychology of the prisoners is the same everywhere and we, too, had expected a better classification for political prisoners, if nothing else, from the new ministry.

There were more than three hundred terrorist prisoners in the Andamans, belonging to various provinces, including those under Congress rule. Old-time prisoners had become Congress ministers in charge of law and order. The Andaman prisoners

were far from their homes, completely cut off from their country, without any means, legal or illegal, of making their plight known to their countrymen. They, too, had expected that the Government would take steps to improve their lot. They looked hopefully towards the future, but no new developments of a reassuring nature took place, and they felt nothing could be more satisfying to the alien Government than the existing arrangements under which they were kept out of India and deprived of every possible chance of public support in favour of removing their grievances.

A number of prisoners from the Punjab and Bihar were of the opinion that they should demand repatriation and release and should declare a hunger-strike if the Government refused to take any steps in that direction.

We read in the *Statesman* the communique issued by the Government of India announcing the hunger-strike of more than three hundred prisoners in the Andamans. A wave of sympathy swept the whole of the country and she awoke at last to recognise her forgotten sons. The result was a widespread agitation in favour of their demands.

Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of the prisoners in his own hands and wired to them to call off their hunger-strike. They had addressed a joint letter to the Mahatma informing him that they had given up their faith in terrorism. This denunciation of their former creed strengthened the hands of the Mahatma and he began corresponding with the Viceroy on the issue of the prisoners' repatriation and release.

Eventually the demand for repatriation was accepted by the Government and they came back to the country with high hopes that their second demand would be presented with even more vigour.

Ten of them, Baba Gurmukh Singh (of the 1914-15 conspiracy case), Dr. Gaya Parshad, Vijay Kumar Sinha, Jai Dev Kapur, Kamal Nath Tewari and Shiv Verma (of the first Lahore conspiracy case) and Mehta Khushi Ram, Muni Raj

and Hazara Singh (of the Ootacamund dacoity case) and Dhanwantari (of the Delhi conspiracy case and at one time an absconder in our case) came to join us in the Central Jail, Lahore.

Baba Gurmukh Singh had come during the last war from America along with hundreds of other Indians to fight for India's independence He was convicted for conspiracy and sentenced to transportation for life. He made good his escape while he was being transferred from one jail to another in 1923. He again plunged himself into political work, and went to Russia, became a communist and came back from that country when his case fellows were released from jail in 1930 to re-organise his old comrades. He restarted the work of the Ghadar Party in India, worked in the villages and gave a stimulus to the organisation of Kisans. He remained very active during his life as an absconder till he was again arrested in 1936. Sent to the Andamans, he began to convass support for putting up a united demand for repatriation and release of all terrorist prisoners. And now here he was, back in a jail of his province.

These comrades told us that the masses of all countries had gone ahead towards socialism by leaps and bounds while we were in jail. They were quite confident of their release and would not believe us when we told them that the ministries in the Punjab and Bengal had not changed in character and were pursuing the same reactionary policy towards political prisoners as had been laid down by their predecessors. The Andaman comrades had come in the spirit of trained teachers and seemed isolated in the apathetic and not very congenial atmosphere of the Punjab.

Baba Gurmukh Singh was of the view that another hunger-strike would become necessary for enforcing the demand for release.

The Minister for Jails came to visit us one day and we availed ourselves of the opportunity to acquaint him with the predicament of the "C" class political prisoners.

"What about our release?" asked Baba Gurmukh Singh; and the Minister, showing surprise, replied, "Release! Our ministry is not contemplating the release of terrorist prisoners!"

Babaji, a bit taken aback at this frank avowal of policy, tried to enlighten the Minister on the subject and told him of an assurance about repatriation and release that had been given to them in the Andamans.

The Minister scanned the face of the old revolutionary and enquired, "Who gave you the assurance? Certainly not our ministry."

Babaji explained in detail that Mahatma Gandhi had exchanged letters with them and having got the assurance from all of them that they had abjured their faith in terrorism, had corresponded with the Viceroy on the subject of repatriation and release. He pointed out that they had been brought back to the country on that account.

"But you have given us no such assurance!" remarked the Minister.

Babaji replied a bit impatiently, "Our letter denouncing terrorism had been sent to Mahatmaji through you," and added after a pause, "You, too, represent the people. What is the difference between you and the old bureaucracy if you are not going to consider our question after the inauguration of provincial autonomy?"

The honourable Minister felt offended at the last words of Baba Gurmukh Singh. He did not feel inclined for any more talk and left our ward. We had our meals and were locked up for the night a few minutes later.

The Superintendent was very critical next day of Babaji's not behaving properly towards the Minister.

After a couple of days Babaji was called to the jail gate by the Deputy Superintendent for an interview. Then he saw that the police were waiting to escort him to Multan Jail.

"You ought to have informed me before of my transfer so that I could have brought my things with me," complained Babaji to the Deputy Superintendent.

"Now go directly with the police guard and your articles will be sent to you afterwards," ordered the Deputy.

Babaji was not willing to go unless he was allowed to fetch his belongings. The Deputy Superintendent ordered the police to handcuff him by force. They did so and dragged him out to the prison van. We learnt of his being taken away like this in the evening and realised how helpless we were at times.

Within a few days they transferred many of our comrades on account of shortage of accommodation in the ward. Pandit Inderpal, Malik Kundan Lal, Swami Hans Raj, S. Tara Singh and S. Hazara Singh were taken to Montgommery Jail. We had been discussing our intended hunger-strike for the past few days and parted with our comrades with our minds busy with the thought of a life-and-death struggle in the near future. It would have been a great privilege to suffer together, but fate would not have it so.

Comrades Vijay Kumar, Kamal Nath, Gaya Parshad, Jai Dev and Shiv Varma belonged to the United Provinces and Bihar where Congress ministries were functioning. They were confident that the Congress would sympathetically consider their case.* But our province had ministers whom our foreign rulers themselves would have gladly nominated. We had heard their point of view from the Minister for Jails, and had now to make ourselves heard by the tribunal of public conscience! A hunger-strike was the only backing that we could give to our demand for release, and better treatment in the meanwhile.

News reached us that Baba Gurmukh Singh was already on hunger-strike in the Multan Jail. The Comrades from United Provinces and Bihar had applied for a transfer to their respective provinces and were not in favour of going on hunger-strike. Two or three others were in bad health. The remaining eleven

of us, namely, Comrades Dhanwantari, Sher Jung, Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal, Bachint Singh, Sundar Singh, Udham Singh, Hazara Singh, Muni Lal, Khushi Ram Mehta, and I prepared an application in which we gave in detail the points in favour of our release and also the reasons for our immediately going on hunger-strike. A copy of that application was smuggled outside for our friends and sympathisers.

Orders for the classification of Pandit Rupchand, Jahangiri Lal and Pandit Kishori Lal as "B" class prisoners had been issued by the Government some days earlier. The five comrades belonging to the United Provinces and Bihar and Malik Kundan Lal had only been allowed "B" class diet. But we were not willing to be misled by this classification of a few of us into sidetracking the main issue of the release of all political prisoners. We had demanded that the distinction of "B" and "C" class amongst political prisoners should cease and that all should be treated better.

CHAPTER XI

THE HUNGER-STRIKE

ON the morning of the 11th of January, we packed our private belongings, books, etc., into cloth-bags and asked the head warder-in-charge to open the Godown. He saw us deposit our bundles there and at once realised what we were up to. On his immediate report, the Assistant Superintendent-in-charge rushed to see us and we handed over to him our application addressed to the Government. A few minutes later the Superintendent also arrived. He said we were taking a very hasty step and ought to give notice to the Government for the consideration of our demands before resorting to hunger-strike. But we knew better: had the authorities been given an inkling earlier of our intentions, they would at once have managed to scatter us to various

jails and thus made all concerted action impossible—a trick they had used again and again against hunger-strikes. And yet there was, perhaps, just a touch of sincerity about what the Superintendent said, for placed as he was, he must have regarded our hunger-strike as a fool-hardy step, and would regard all measures to avert it as measures calculated to do us good. When he found that he had failed to persuade us to postpone the hunger-strike he consoled himself with the remark, "Well, any way, I don't consider this hunger-strike as a protest against the jail authorities. It is directed against the Punjab Government, not against me." We hastened to agree.

The hunger-strikers were taken to Ward No. 14 (Old) on his orders. Pandit Rupchand remarked, "We have come back to our old home."

"Yes and nothing seems to have changed here," I replied. "It is so familiar to us that we may very well never have left it at all!"

Here were the same dirty cells, cursed with an age-long narrowness of accommodation and of spirit, and burdened with the wretchedness of innumerable lives confined to them from time to time. They seemed to beckon to us and offer to take us in, and we, surprisingly enough, did feel as if we had come back home. I narrated an anecdote or two, reminiscent of old times, for the benefit of our new comrades.

They dumped seven of us in the cells of the "Badmash Line" and the remaining four in the outer row at its back. We had brought nothing except the clothes that we wore and a book or two of a religious or seemingly religious charact terhat would not be disallowed by the jail authorities. I had with me Tagore's *Gitanjali* and *Guru Govind Singh's Life* by Professor Kartar Singh. Pandit Rupchand had brought the Bengali version of *Gitanjali*. The title cf the book sounded religious and the officers did not object to it. The seven of the Badmash Line called the four on its back (I was one of these) from their cells and a lively conversation ensued. In the evening I called out to Pandit Rupchand aloud, "How are you?"

Rupchand suffered from chronic constipation. Today, however, he was feeling very light. He gaily replied, "Oh, it is wonderful. I have been reading the song offerings of the illustrious poet with a lucidity of mind never experienced before. I seem to have imbibed the exhilarating effect of the poet's inspiring flights."

I felt equally light and easy. The craving for food was dispelled by a strong resolve to carry on the fight in a hostile environment. There was the risk of death or some permanent injury but this was a part of game we had chosen to play. It was like rising one morning from sleep and finding oneself in a world of inverted values, for hunger, thirst, physical weakness, normally to be dreaded, were now our chosen lot, and obstinacy, bellicosity of spirit, and unthinking stubbornness, normally to be avoided, were qualities most desirable to us. The very instinct of self-preservation was now to be ruthlessly curbed. Our minds were easy and confident, for everything was well thought out and planned in conformity with the best interests of our life in jail.

Ch. Sher Jung inquired next day from all how they fared. When nobody complained of feeling any pangs of hunger, he raised his voice to a high pitch and remarked, "Listen, all of you! The residue in your bowels is putrefying, that is why you don't feel hungry. Mine are clean and my stomach is constantly demanding food! Take a purgative, that is what you badly need!

We made fun of his desire for food. A purgative was a necessity, indeed, but we were not given even a laxative. "My duty is to see that you do not lose weight nor grow weak," said the Superintendent. He advised us complete rest. He asked us not to walk in the cells and wanted us to preserve our energies. But what could we do but weave with our feet the web of our thoughts which crowded on us in prolific abundance? My mind showed an unusual alacrity and would rest nowhere in its wanderings. Gay and light, I flitted from place to place, and an

occassional sip from *Gitanjali* or *Guru Govind Singh's Life* was sufficient to sustain me for long hours of lonely wanderings.

The vacant cells in our row were being cleaned. A new doctor arrived on the fourth day and established his office, his store-room and a small dispensary in these cells. He visited all of us one by one in the evening and enquired about our health. We told him that we were hale and hearty and needed no medical assistance.

On the fifth day there was unusual activity in those cells, and doctors and lambardars swarmed into the ward. Never had forcible feeding begun so early in any hunger-strike we knew of. In our view, the Superintendent was bent upon giving us no chance of quickly reaching the stage of exhaustion. We felt that the struggle would be much prolonged if he succeeded. Some of us thought that they would in the beginning feed only those who were more weak. The Superintendent had come and looked carefully into the eyes of every one of us, and seen the chart of our weights. "How are you?" he had asked me and I had replied, "Quite fit!" I did not get the impression that he was going to force-feed me.

The first victim of forcible feeding was Sirdar Bachint Singh in the cell next to mine. At about five in the evening his cell was unlocked and a force of lambardars, about a dozen strong, entered. He had experience of several hunger-strikes and we listened to the noise of the hand-to-hand struggle that ensued when they tried to over-power him. Everything was quite within a quarter of an hour. A few minutes later the Superintendent appeared before my cell.

"Don't you feel a bit weak?" he enquired.

"Not at all," I replied promptly.

He smiled a little and the head warder behind him came forward to unlock my cell. The party of stalwart lambardars marched in. I at once stepped aside and took to a corner.

"Don't exert yourself, keep to the bed," advised the Superintendent again and again. I pushed my captors away several times and the scuffle with them continued for some minutes, but

they were too many for me. They overpowered me at last and held me fast upon the bed-stead. The elderly Sikh doctor, a feeding expert, came in with the feeding apparatus. My legs and arms were secured fast by half a dozen men and my head caught firmly by four strong hands without allowing it any movement. I lay supine, panting heavily. The doctor inserted the rubber tube into my nostril. A few drops of blood and watery fluid flowed out and my eyes grew watery. The painful grating sensation continued for a few seconds and then the tube reached my gullet. In a few minutes the feeding cup was emptied into my stomach and the tube taken out. All those in the room went out. My door was locked. The food was irritating me like poison. I tried to vomit it out but in vain. I washed my eyes and nose and then stood listening to the noise in the next cell. It was the same with all without any exception. Having finished their job, the doctors went away and peace again reigned in our ward. We called to one another and talked about what we could do.

"We can do nothing but take the blows lying down," Mehta Khushi Ram laughingly told us.

The feeling of helplessness was common. Pandit Rupchand and one or two others had succeeded in vomiting out the enforced food. Some others had tried and failed. Our sole concern was to foil the attempts of the doctors to maintain our strength. One method was to resist as much as we could even to the point of utter exhaustion. Another was to continue walking for hours inside the cell. Ch. Sher Jung advised hard exercise, but it was not practical for most of us.

They began to feed us twice daily. Only a few could vomit out the contents of their stomach after feeding, and their weights were decreasing daily. The doctors consulted literature on hunger-strikes and found a method whereby vomiting could be checked. They would first fill the stomach of such a hunger-striker with water and let him vomit. The liquid diet would only then be poured in, and the hunger-striker would not be

allowed to leave his bed for some time. The device met with cent per cent success. Our weight seemed to come to a standstill. We were losing in strength but very slowly.

As the days went by, we insisted more and more on being allowed books other than religious ones and the Superintendent agreed at last to let us have some from the jail library. I got *Demos* by George Gissing and *If Winter Comes* by Hutchinson. There was no mental fatigue at all. The taste for food had lent itself to the hunger for reading matter. The books I got proved to be of absorbing interest.

We were allowed no news of the outside world. The strictest possible vigilance was maintained against any communication reaching us. The Superintendent, however, never missed a chance of bringing us discouraging news. "The Government circles are completely unmoved. They have absolutely refused to consider your case unless you give up hunger-strike." "Such and such eminent Congress leaders have expressed themselves against your step." He showed us telegrams that advised us to break the fast. He tried to read the expression on our faces and sent daily reports to the authorities.

"None of you is susceptible to reason. The trouble is that you are causing unnecessary trouble to the already over-worked jail-staff," he would say repeatedly. He would round off his criticism by a realistic observation about our total inability to produce any impression upon the all-powerful Government. None of us wasted any time on arguing with him.

One day a prisoner friend occupying a privileged position in the jail brought us the news that our comrades in Multan and Montgommery Jails, too, were on hunger-strike in sympathy. The news was confirmed by the casual remarks made by one of the doctors to another doctor. This doctor was to take charge of the hunger-strikers in Montgommery and had come to watch the forcible feeding with a view to gaining necessary experience and knowledge.

Our resistance to forcible feeding continued. We knew there was no chance of avoiding food, but such resistance was a necessary part of our struggle. One day one of Baba Sundar Singh's arms was dislocated—he continued to resist with the other arm. Minor injuries and scratches were usual ; but we could not retaliate against the prisoner lambardars. It was no pleasant duty, indeed ; they were forced to do the dirty job. Ours, moreover, was a moral fight against the Government for justice and better treatment for all political prisoners. Non-political prisoners, or even the jail officers, had nothing to do with it. They had by and by acquired the experience of employing force with skill ; care and caution were replacing their former crude and evidently brutal methods. We were growing physically weaker slowly but surely. The fortnight that had passed had brought the confidence to us that the feeding could not stop the gradual deterioration in our health, which was inevitable in spite of all the Superintendent's precautionary measures. If we could go so far as to sacrifice a few lives, we were sure to win. We were determined to carry on without yielding till the battle was won.

They began to unlock our cells one afternoon and asked us to come out. Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava of Lahore and Mr. Mohan Lal Saxena, President of the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee, had come to see us. They came with the Superintendent, and we all sat in the compound of the Badmash Line.

Mr. Saxena told us of the difficulties that had arisen because of our hunger-strike. "We have accepted ministries for the sake of a great cause," he said and asked, "How can we remain in office while you are dying ?"

Mr. Dhanwantari reminded him of the promises that had been made to the Andaman prisoners and explained the circumstances that had forced the hunger-strike upon us.

Mr. Saxena, unconvinced, said, "You ought not to have taken this step. There was never any question of your problem

being ignored ; we would have solved it in due time. Our ministry has taken up the cause of the release of political prisoners in our province. We are bent upon creating a deadlock over this issue. Give up your hunger-strike and wait for the results of our efforts."

"Can you assure us that the Punjab Ministry will follow your line?" we asked, reminding him thereby that ours was not a Congress province.

"You are harassing none but us, who are your own, by continuing the hunger-strike," insisted Mr. Saxena.

We told him that there was no going back now. We were sure that the cause of the political prisoners in our province would suffer badly if we abandoned our hunger-strike.

Mr. Saxena was disappointed but he went on pressing his point. Meanwhile some of us talked to Dr. Gopi Chand, and learnt from him about the developments that had taken place after our hunger-strike. A great demonstration was held before the Assembly Chamber in spite of the Government order banning all processions. Public opinion was being aroused in favour of our demand. All this was encouraging news. But Doctor was pessimistic about the Governments attitude and advised us to entertain no illusions about our ability to influence the reactionary ministry of the province through personal suffering, however great it may be.

Raizada Hans Raj, another prominent Congress leader, came to see us a few days later. He, too, brought nothing from the Government side and on his own account advised us to give up the hunger-strike. These interviews were the only occasions on which we could see one another, and we were happy to find all the comrades in the best of moods. We discussed how to continue the resistance more effectively. The best way was to become weaker and weaker physically.

I had written an unauthorised letter to L. Sham Lal before starting upon the hunger-strike, explaining in full our reasons for the step and requesting him to intervene only when there

was some likelihood of our demand being accepted by the Government. We knew how anxious he would be; my letter was meant more to keep him from coming to us than for any other purpose, for we did not relish the idea of having to say "no" to him.

Nevertheless, contrary to our expectations, he turned up one day in the company of Dr. Gopi Chand, and we were all unlocked to meet them. Unhappy at his coming, I wondered what I would say to him. "We were not expecting a visit from you," I remarked, and then realising that my tone lacked in geniality, added, "but one gain of our struggle is that you have been allowed to see us."

He looked at me, then at others, smiled and said, "I let a month pass and was not willing to come even now, but I was compelled to do so by the relatives of 'X'. They told me that his condition was critical, that he was dying, but I see that weak though you all are, there was much exaggeration in the information given to me. His relatives had also given me the impression that 'X' wanted to meet me as soon as possible.

"Who gave them the false news?" asked 'X' in surprise.

"I do not know," replied Lalaji.

"Some jail employee, obviously," opined Rupchand

"Never mind," observed Lalaji with evident satisfaction at seeing us all in high spirits. He then proceeded to give his own reactions about the situation. "Now that I am here, I must tell you what I think is right," he said. "What do you expect from the Government which would have been only too happy if you had all been hanged ? For them you are terrorists still even though you have renounced your faith in terrorism. Congressites like me have, since the declaration of your changed views, regarded you as the vanguard of the forces of struggle for freedom, but the Punjab Ministry entertains no kind thoughts towards you. Can you move their hearts even with one or two deaths that might result from this hunger-strike ? Take it from me that you can influence only those who are, more or less,

sympathetic to you or the independence movement of our country. You can exert pressure only upon those whom you call your own; and you have fully succeeded in that."

But how could we turn back now without achieving some concrete result ? We put this question to Lalaji and he replied, "I think persistence in your protest is no longer necessary. Listen, you have brought the question of political prisoners to the forefront. The ministry here might never accept all of your demands, but they will take some half-way steps. All depends upon how much pressure the Congress can put upon them. You have roused so much public sympathy for your cause. Let us exploit this hopeful situation, as far as possible!" Lalaji informed us that Mahatma Gandhi had addressed a moving appeal to us through the Press, saying that his days were numbered and that he would leave no stone unturned to secure our release. Lalaji asked us to believe in the pledge of honour given by the Congress leaders that they would never feel peace and comfort till they have secured our release. He told us that the Congress Ministers in Bihar and the United Provinces had resigned over the issue of terrorist prisoners' release.

Dr. Gopi Chand informed us that our case would be taken up again at the coming session of the All-India Congress. He reminded us of the death of Jatindar Nath Das of the first Lahore Conspiracy Case, who had given his life during a hunger-strike resorted to for securing better classification for all political prisoners. The Government had yielded to his demand then, but had taken away the classes of all prisoners of that case after the day of their conviction. They, he told us, might yield, even now, and may order the release of those whom they may regard as deserving cases, but very few could hope to benefit by their leniency. Because of the pressure of our hunger-strike the Government was thinking of releasing Babbar Akali prisoners, and a few other names may be added to the list. That, however, was all that was expected of their reactionary and niggardly attitude. "Be patient and see what the Congress can do for you," advised Doctor Sahib.

We felt the weight of what these leaders told us. We held a brief consultation among ourselves and then informed them that we were ready to call off the hunger-strike if the Congress attitude towards the question of our release and better treatment was given practical shape in the form of a resolution passed and a programme chalked out at the All-India session which was to take place shortly. We also desired a personal letter from Mahatmaji addressed to us on the lines of his statement to the Press. Lalaji and Doctor Sahib agreed to put our case forcefully at the session. They concurred with us that meanwhile the hunger-strike should go on.

The logic of what these leaders had told us was indeed irresistible. We could expect no concession from our political opponents, whose sole aim was to maintain themselves in power by crushing the progressive forces aligned against them and by suppressing the just demands of those whom they had imprisoned for political reasons. All that we could do was to put our case before the public, and this we had done to the best of our ability. There was no sense in mounting any more pressure upon the patriotic organisation sympathetic to our cause. Our hopes lay, not merely in our capacity to suffer, but in the mass support that we could enlist in our favour. None of us had any illusions about effecting a change of heart in our alien rulers. They would make no concessions except when forced to do so, and the only power that could force them was public pressure. The progress of units was uniform with the progress of the organisation. We could only believe in mass awakening in the steady progressive march of our countrymen towards the common goal. If the people had power they would come to our aid.

Lala Sham Lal and Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava came back from the Tripuri Session of the Congress on the afternoon of February 24, 1938. They brought with them a copy of the resolution on political prisoners and also a letter from Mahatma Gandhi asking us to break our fast.

"What about our comrades in the Multan and Montgommery jails ? Should we not all break the fast together ?" asked Mr. Dhanwantari.

"No! Break yours first and I shall take the happy news to them," replied Lala Sham Lal, and smiled a broad, good-natured smile.

He ordered oranges from outside, and the jail authorities brought us milk. We broke our fast which we had kept up for a month and a half.

We had the opportunity of having a talk with L. Sham Lal for about half an hour. He had grown old and was suffering from high blood pressure in addition to chronic gout. He told us with much feeling that his health debarred him from taking an active part in the day-to-day activities of the Congress. His mission, he said, was to see us employing our youthful energies in the cause of the country in his life-time. He felt that this was perhaps our last meeting.

"We hope to gain more power at the Centre, and then we can exert pressure on the Provincial Government which refuses to release you now. Our country would be very unfortunate indeed if it does not achieve sufficient power to secure your release in a year or two."

With these touching words, he bade us good-bye and was gone.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER-THOUGHTS AND AFTER-EFFECTS

THE hunger-strike had its mental as well as physical after-effects. It was nothing more than a cry for justice, for freedom, addressed more to our countrymen than to our imperialist masters. There was the urge in us to fight the latter and to seek the help of the former. There was the hunger in us to reach the masses and we had forged a temporary link. The ceaseless monotony of our life had, in a way, led us inevitably to this action, this determined effort to break down the surrounding walls by putting our lives at stake so that we would be able to secure our release or even 'B' class for all. The less I expected the more bitterly did I want to struggle. There was no idea of suicide in my mind, but I hoped to meet death, the logical conclusion of an intense struggle carried on to its bitter end. In other words, I wanted to plung myself with all my strength into a dangerous and difficult conflict. This was obviously not the attitude of mind of the majority of my comrades, for those belonging to the Congress provinces were naturally optimistic about the outcome of the hunger-strike.

But for the intervention of Lala Sham Lal, we would have kept up our hunger-strike till a crisis was reached; a serious situation would have arisen, because it was not for us to call a halt. In view of the completely indifferent attitude of the Government, none of us would have known where to stop. But when it came to relying upon the people, there was no better representative of theirs whom we knew than Lala Sham Lal. Our struggle had come to an end, even though we were in the best of spirits and could conceive of no weakening in our resolve. We had, in our hearts, resented his interference, but could not refuse listening to him, and once we started listening we could not resist his persuasive words. The man exerted on us an amazing influence.

Had I acted reasonably and like a normal human being during all the phases of this struggle? No, indeed! The oppressive atmosphere of the prison, charged with the filth of centuries and

the suffocating fumes of age-long suffering that emanated from human hearts had gradually infiltrated into our beings. The environment around us was beset with difficulties, problems and obstacles of a sort that hardly ever arise in a life normally lived in freedom. The necessity of breaking loose from galling restrictions was brought home to us at every step. An inhuman effort carried on with an inhuman energy was necessary if we wanted to satisfy our urge to live, to survive, and to reach the greater field of activity outside the pale of our hand-and-foot-bound prison world.

In the circumstances I could not but be conscious of a sort of class-war going on between the prisoners and their jailers. At night, while we slept, the warders called us many times to make sure of our being alive. They counted us morning and evening like so many heads of cattle and we resented that. They searched us and the resentment grew. The thud and thumb of their boots on the patch outside our cells was anathema to us. But they were doing their duty, so were the officers when they opposed every rightful demand, every effort for improving our diet and conditions. That was exactly what the Government expected of them, what they were paid for. In these circumstances the urge for a struggle was as natural and as inevitable as the urge for air and water. Conflict was inherent in the very situation in which we found ourselves; our urges were in direct contradiction to the will of those who had organised the prisons where the like of us were kept cooped up in body and in spirit.

There were the memories of past conflicts in which we had taken part and there were the stories about the part that others had played. All these were the precious heritage of the historical struggle bequeathed to us. A prisoner, for example, was beaten to death; another was dubbed a malingerer who had produced a sore in his leg in order to avoid hard labour, and so the Superintendent-cum-medical officer of the jail amputated his leg. Yet another was suspected of having put some offensive thing into his eyes to obtain a few days' relief from work, and so one of his eyes was taken out! Such stories, true or false, carried

conviction with the prisoners, for it seemed to them that it *could* happen to them any day. Gossip is, in the circumstances, mixed with truth, and reality diluted with exaggeration; but the "C" class prisoners' horrible plight inevitably creates bitter struggles.

We, the "terrorist" and "dangerous" prisoners, had never resorted to violence as a measure or counter-measure against jail officers. Our weapons, in all the fights, had been boycott, non-co-operation; we had become conscisous of the advantages as well as the drawbacks and limitations of a violent struggle. Never did we feel helpless and hedged in while launching a non-violent struggle, because of the ease with which we could come to decisions. Experience had taught us what form of struggle was best suited to our situation. Violence was something hidden in the recesses of our hearts, like a suppressed and primitive impulse. An individual was sometimes provoked, but the group checked his instinctive outburst. We frequently consulted one another as we always preferred to take joint steps and acted in unison. That was how "violence" was reduced into an unnecessary weapon.

Terrorism was an individual method of approach to social and political problems. It could never envelop the larger issues before the country. It had limited us in the past, but we were able to free ourselves from its narrowing influence and embrace the wider, broader and universally applicable ideal of socialism. How could we go to the masses preaching terrorism, and what difficulty of theirs could we solve with its aid?

We had come back to the Terrorist Ward. I devoted all my attention to the study of the method and principles of socialism. It was a renewed attempt on my part to find out the best way of resolving the age-long conflict in its limited as well as its wider aspect. The hunger-strike had made me conscious of our limitations, and it was imperative to think of our problems in the light of the larger struggle of the masses of the country.

The physical repercussions of the hunger-strike were naturally not healthy. A hunger-strike means disregarding the laws of

our physiological nature. As a result I had a severe attack of piles during the later half of the hunger-strike and the trouble seemed to persist. Pandit Rupchand's health had badly suffered and he never completely got over the after-effects of the past. The most unfortunate case was that of Pandit Inderpal who had a numb patch on his right thigh, which subsequently developed into paralysis of the right side.

The Babbar Akalis were released one by one. The comrades with short sentences, too, had gone. Those belonging to the United Provinces and Bihar had been transferred to their respective provinces. The Madras prisoners were set free by their ministry. Pandit Inderpal, Malik Nathu Ram, and other old companions of ours, who had been previously transferred to Montgommery Jail, had come back.

It was here that Pandit Inderpal one day fell victim to a stroke of paralysis. The doctors said that it was a case of a nerve lesion in the brain. The Pandit had been complaining of the numbness in the right thigh but the medical officer had, as usual, paid no attention. Inderpal was no longer able to move. Only nine or ten of us were left in the ward. The Pandit needed day and night attendance and we sat by his bedside by turns. He was examined by a specialist from the Mayo Hospital. After some days a medical board came to examine him and report on his condition. The Superintendent had recommended his release. Friends outside were also trying to secure his release, which was ordered in the first week of January 1938. It was a great relief to all of us.

A few days later Mr. Jahangiri Lal, our comrade who had no legs, was released on compassionate grounds, largely due to the untiring efforts of Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon, M.L.A., and the leader of the Opposition Party in the Provincial Assembly, Dr. Gopichand Bhargava.

Another friend, comrade Girdhari Lal of the Amritsar Revolver Case, joined us in the Terrorist Ward. Malik Nathu Ram, our old comrade who was still serving his sentence of seven years,

was transferred from Montgommery Jail to Lahore. He had been on hunger-strike there along with others. He and I were placed in the "B" class through Lal Sham Lal's personal influence with the Minister for Jails. We were overjoyed to have Malik Nathu Ram again amongst us. He looked rather pulled down because of the persisting after-effects of the hunger-strike. Swami Hans Raj was also later on classified as a better-class prisoner.

Girdhari Lal was a young snub-nosed comrade with broad, frank and familiar features, a jolly expression always animating his face. He knew the art of measuring by yards where inches were the rule. We had our own kitchen now and managed it by turns. Where seven tumblers of lassi were required, Girdhari Lal was most likely to prepare twenty. We ran after him or he ran before us after such exploits, but a prodigal like him had nothing more than boisterous merriment to offer in response to the corrective measures of the rest. The days of his management of the kitchen took us through many a vicissitude of fortune. He was generous of heart, over-generous of friendship, and master of not a few of those boons of bountiful Nature which add charm to the human personality.

Malik Nathu Ram, cheerful in spite of his ailing health, made his company most precious to us by his neat, calm and careful habits. The five years of his separation from us had effected pleasant change in his emotionally high-strung nature. We saw that as he had become more aged he had also become more gentle and considerate.

Girdhari Lal parted from us within a few months when his release came through. We, the lifers, were like boatmen who had ferried scores of people across the river and now found our boat stuck in the mud of the bank. Only five of us were left now. The days of big meetings, large gatherings, festivities, struggles on a mass scale, inspiring poetical symposia, and imposing literary discourses were no more. Our small garden, the result of years of sweating toil, was nourished in token of a happy life lived together in the past. Our diminished society

left us calm, contemplative, and peace-loving and increased our introspective tendency. We, the remaining five, were all in better class, enjoying facilities for reading and for indoor and outdoor games, which were denied to us in the "C" class. We, however, could not avail ourselves, of the latter facility and repeatedly requested the Superintendent to allow us to play volley ball out-side our ward with non-political "B" class prisoners, but the segregation orders stood in his way and he refused. At last, he permitted some "B" class prisoners to come and play in our ward. Now we had the chance to associate with non-terrorist prisoners: at last the barriers had, to a certain extent. been broken. Every day we spent an hour and a half in sport and felt the refreshing effect of new social ties.

CHAPTER XIII
LALAJI PASSES AWAY

I was permitted books from an outside library and became a member of the Punjab Public Library. We had also been allowed the daily *Tribune*, another contribution to the limited interests of our monotonous life. Our life was now a slightly improved version of the days spent by four of us in a portion of Ward No. 14 (Old). About seven years of exclusive association with prisoners of our own category had made us accustomed to a secluded and circumscribed way of living. Our contribution to the common effort for the amelioration of the ordinary prisoners' lot was negligible. Because of our segregation from them. all our struggles had been without any direct reference to the conditions under which they lived. But naturally with the passage of time, some improvements for the common benefit of prisoners had in fact taken place. Our sympathisers and friends outside were still continuing their

endeavours for our release, but the prospects were not favourable because of persistent rumours about the imminence of another great war. On the first day of September 1939 came the news of the German declaration of war on Poland. The whole world seemed fated to be plunged into this unprecedented holocaust.

"What about India?" we naturally wondered. I thought of her forced participation in the war, of the pointless sacrifice of lakhs of our countrymen, and of the new promises held out to her—promises that would be perhaps subsequently broken. Here was also the opportunity for exerting greater pressure on Britain to loosen her hold on our country. It seemed to me, however, that a war would, above all, bring acute misery and untold privations for our countrymen, compensated by no substantial advancement in our status during the war. Perhaps this feeling was the result of the pessimism engendered by long-term imprisonment.

There had come, with the acceptance of office by the Congress, an unwonted vigour into the politics of our country. The ministers had embarked upon various programmes for the welfare of the masses. People had begun to express their views more openly, as the popular ministries were in no mood to brook any supression of civil liberties. Police administration was subjected to bold criticism everywhere. The country was not agreeable to fighting an imperialist war for the benefit of Britain. Britain would first have to agree to the principle of our independence. But war was declared on our behalf without even consulting the Central Legislature. The Congress was prepared to pledge its support to the common struggle for freedom from aggression provided effective powers were placed in the hands of representatives of the Indian people. The Congress ministries had to vacate office because the British Government was not willing to part with power, and thus a constitutional deadlock was created in the country that could be solved only with the formation of a national government at the Centre with chosen representatives of the people as its members. A reign of special powers and

ordinances and mass arrests began ; and the public workers who had been hardly out of jail found themselves behind the bars again.

On the 6th of January, 1940, came the said news of Lala Sham Lal's death of heart failure. Our main link with the outer world had suddenly snapped. He had been to us everything that the outside world could possibly be for us. His affection and sympathy for us, his keen desire for our release, his concern for our welfare, his paternal interest in our well-being, all these symbolised the attitude of the patriotic masses of our country towards us. A prisoner is by virtue of circumstances very impressionable and very sensitive. Therefore, I could always sense the great warmth that this quiet, undemonstrative, simple and valiant soldier of freedom carried for us in his heart.

All normal human relationships are based on reciprocity. No reciprocity, no give and take, no mutuality of response, however, is possible in the relations of a prisoner with the outside world. A prisoner demands care and sympathy without being in a position to return them. He is a beggar who demands love in charity. He has either to accept the greatest gifts of sympathy and affection, that man can give to man, knowing full well that he has no way of responding with gifts that match, or he has to be self-centred enough to limit himself within the protective armour of his own proud self. How many of us can be so coldy self-sufficient? A prisoner, therefore, is forced to accept this one-way traffic, forced to take without ever being able to give, forced to be always on the receiving end. Normally one comes across hardly anyone who can keep up this continuous one way flow of affection spontaneously and easily, without any thought of reciprocity. L. Sham Lal was that rare person. He gave without any expectation of a fair return. He had no conditions to impose. He was not a tradesman in love who invests affection, he was the prince who lavished his gifts with a free heart shorn of all calculation. For us he risked even his life. Our defence had entailed an overstraining of his physical powers; for more than three years he had overtaxed his energies and ruined

his health. For years before that he had defended the cases of poor Congress workers who could not afford to pay for a good lawyer, and he had always overworked himself in such cases. His association with us for the past nine years had been a gradual unfolding of the greatness of his heart—and now, to our dismay, that great heart had stopped beating.

His death affected me as the sudden going out of the only light in a dark room affects one. His smiling face, lit up by his inner warmth, had brought us the kind of solace that rises from a deeper insight into life, for in his own gentle way he had brought us a new understanding of the great issues for which we had staked our very lives. Unobtrusively, almost imperceptibly, he had slipped into the recesses of our youthful hearts and snuggled there till their very beatings had found a new rhythm. His was a great shaping, moulding influence; and I had come to associate him deeply with my life. My little ambitions and small necessities had somehow become attuned to him. A prisoner that I was, I was naturally pre-occupied with my own thoughts, and was no doubt affected by the environments. His generosity, on the other hand, had the loud call of a flood which could flush our hearts and force the chained energies of our souls to seek broader outlets. He had kept our hearts young and fresh; he had helped us keep before us the broader perspectives which one tends to lose when the petty annoyances of prison life try to crowd them out of sight.

He represented an ideology different from mine. He had, all his life, struggled and fought for the sake of our country in his own way—Gandhiji's way. I had seen him deal with the police, the judges, and with us his terrorist clients. Underlying all these dealings I had invariably felt the throbbing vein of humanity. Never had this human trait been missing from his actions, whether great or of everyday insignificance.

He believed in effecting a change of heart in the British ruling class through the practice of non-violence and truth, and could even credit them with a genuine desire for the betterment

of our conditions. It was natural that there should have been differences of opinion with him, but was there any ground for differing from his all-embracing humanity, the noble intellectual impulse of his heart and his spirit of understanding, and toleration? Could the irradiation of his soul be denied? The nature of his influence was not ideological; it was an influence in terms of personality, not ideology, it was not intellectual but spiritual. Ideological influences are ephemeral, for with the growth of intellect one's ideology is always liable to develop and change. Influences that mould the personality, that affect our way of life and pattern of behaviour are of an abiding nature, and such was the influence of L. Sham Lal. Thanks to him, never could I feel easy when heat was generated or bitterness created in the course of struggles we had to wage in prison. Whenever hatred burnt in me it left me weaker in spite of an apparent success in a clash. There were, on the other hand, occasions when cool-headed conduct, not headstrong emotion had brought peace to us. I discovered, through the intervention of his personality as it were, that all human problems are solved best when they are approached in a human way—without the haze of prejudice or the heat of fanaticism.

Lalaji's influence was more precious to me now that he was no more, and I had an inner urge to tally my spirit with his, and to imbibe as much of his waning light as I was capable of.

He was continuously in my memory for many days and nights. Had I been free I would, in all probability, have been excessively grieved over his death for a day or two and would then have reverted to the normal activities of life. But it was no pang of acute, shooting pain but a deep all-pervasive sorrow, resembling love gently felt and carefully nourished. He was to me like a revolutionary dying in an armed conflict with the enemies of freedom. His life seemed to be a long preparation for this final step. That was why this gentle votary of non-violence could feel at one, in his heart, with scores of revolutionaries who had believed in nothing but a blow for a blow and blood for blood.

Now that he had gone, I wished to be possessed of his vision along with the revolutionary fervour that should be the equipment of all who serve the cause of their country.

He had died earlier than I and had thus raised himself infinitely higher than any heights of sacrifice to which I, the still living, could ever aspire. His death was a consummation; it was the supreme offering at the altar of a cause. How could we, burdened with the incompleteness that attends the living, ever hope to vie with him?

I wondered he was so simple and so pure, and yet so wise and so great! I sought more light on the truths of his life, and more insight into the workings of his richly endowed mind. It was the end of an old and the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

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CHAPTER XIV

KHAKSARS

THE Punjab Government had embarked upon a policy of wholesale arrests, and many radical workers, especially the old terrorists, were already in prison. The war against the Nazis had in our country been turned by our imperialist masters into a war against the forces of nationalism. Our old friends, Tika Ram Sukhan, Dhanwantari, Tehl Singh, and others had come this time as security prisoners to be detained till the end of the war. They had brought startling news of seething discontent in the country. Their hearts were full of hope for a better future tending to break the crust of our pessimism. They were transferred to other jails within a short period.

The Government ban on all sorts of military drill and wearing of military uniforms by volunteers of public bodies brought it in conflict with the *Khaksars*, an organisation under the leadership of Allama Mashriqi, an intellectual. The *Khaksars* mustered strong in the city of Lahore with a view to breaking the ban. On the 23rd of March, a procession of their volunteers was taken out in given uniform and with "belchas." The "belcha" was the emblem of their organisation and it was supposed to signify social service. The police challenged them and a clash ensued, many *Khaksars* were killed in the encounter. The *Khaksars* had met the challenge of the police with their "belchas" and a high police officer was killed and some others of the force were wounded. Several hundred *Khaksars* were arrested.

Respectable middle-class citizens, mainly shopkeepers, suspected of sympathising with the *Khaksars*, were rounded up and detained under Section 129 of the Defence of India Rules. Twenty-two of them were kept in our ward. One of their *salars* was detained under Section 26 of the D.I.R. We were glad to avail ourselves of the company of these Muslim citizens of Lahore, the majority of whom were educated young men who became very friendly with us within a few days.

We wished to talk with them upon the topic dearest to our hearts—the independence of our country. They listened to what we said, but it was great disappointment to learn that they had no interest in politics. They would not discuss political issues. Their approach towards secular problems was fundamentally religious. All of them offered *Namaz* together and listened to the after-prayer preaching of a maulvi who was a member of their group. They became more and more friendly when they came to know that we respected their religious sentiments well and were yearning for fresh society in this lonely ward of the prison.

We talked with some of the *Khaksars* about socialism, about the incompatibility of Islam with the slavery that was the lot of our countrymen and impressed upon them the necessity of thinking about ways and means of obtaining the freedom of our vast sub-continent. They would neither corroborate nor contradict us on any point, but they were nevertheless sympathetic to our aspirations about the future of our country. After a few days their *salar* suspecting that they were being drawn into political discussion, ordered them to refrain from doing so. As a result we lost all hope of winning them over. We, however, got great response from them as far as social relations were concerned.

They were a care-free and happy lot. The poets among them recited poems, and singers sang songs. Their bustling activity exerted a gladdening influence over us as we had yearning for such activity.

What did *Khaksarism* mean? Theocracy? Pan-Islamism? What else? No one could enilghten us on this point. Even the *Salar* of the *Khaksars* could tell us nothing about the ultimate object of their movement. Professedly, they were not communal. They seemed to have no consciousness of any clear-cut political goal. They were all soldiers, they said and all that they knew was that they must follow their leader, the Allama without any questioning. They had suffered greatly and bravely in the recent clash with the police, and though they had shown

religious fortitude, a religious aim was still nowhere to be discerned.

I felt that the majority of Muslims of the country had the same semi-conscious, vaguely political and fundamentally religious attitude towards the problems facing our country. It was also the case with Hindus but to a lesser extent. Politics was the need of the hour, a means towards deliverance for the subjugated people of our country. Being indifferent and vague towards it meant being careless of our freedom of our future. The ban of the *Salar* on political discussion was wholly unjustified, but we did not raise our voice against it, for the sake of amiable relations and peace.

They, too, had begun to feel the stress of want, the denial of ordinary articles of daily use to them, such as ghee, milk, tobacco, and writing material. They tried the usual method of the prisoners and got some facilities.

One of them, a *pahlwan*, was too fat to offer *Namaz*, Nature had compansated him with a pleasant and care-free disposition. Whenever a companion of his chided him for his non-observance of daily *Namaz*, he would declare with a smile, "I am like these terrorists. Count me as one of them in the matter of *Namaz*."

"Your path is write; I am with you!" he would good-naturedly tell us without feeling any encumbering neccssity of looking into the meaning of his words. He was a mine of pleasantries and cheerful encouragement.

One day some of his companions spread the rumour that many release orders had been issued. A false chit was handed to him in the afternoon, asking him along with two others to come to the jail gate for release. He gathered his belongings, distributed in joy the stock of his tobacco, sugar, etc., to the prisoners doing menial work in the ward and stood smiling with satisfaction at the gate of our ward to bid farewell to the remaining associates. He was then told that it was all a joke.

"Never mind!" he said complacently without showing any signs of exasperation, adding, "It is good to be released even in joke.

They were all in fact released after a few days. They continued to remember us through letters for more than six months and then the law of reciprocal relationship asserted itself to our disadvantage.

CHAPTER XV

THE BOAT IS FILLED AGAIN

WE were reduced to five again. No essential change seemed ever possible in this small world of ours, whatever changes did occur touched only the surface. The nucleus consisted of the five of us. Others would come and go and come again, there would be incidents, happenings—some good, some evil—but no such change in external conditions was germinal : such incidents would glide past us, touching only the skin. We five were the hard crust inside, whatever accretions may take place above. Men came and went without subtracting from or adding to our life! Our life seemed at a stand still. There was no doubt a diversity of personality in this unchanging group of five-this one was more impressionable, perhaps, than the others; that one more detached and less communicative—and so on. But these five had a composite personality as well—a total personality with common characteristics. We shared, for example, the yearning for tumultuous joys and sufferings and for upheavals of the soul. This group personality watched and studied and felt; it saw in the prison a symbol of tyranny of man over man, a sort of a cage meant to imprison, not our bodies but our spirits. It reacted to painful obstacles, to hatred and anger and violence, in the most primitive way possible. It looked around with suspicion, sensed danger and sent up a fighting cry whenever hurt. Another part of this group personality, however, had acquired patience, tolerance and forgiveness. We were never

melancholy, never sad, but we had lost much of the stormy side of our joys and sorrows. The insidious atmosphere of jail was beginning to tell, so that we yearned for more, company for fresh visitors to our habitation, and new influences to cope with.

Our mutual relations were ideal. We never criticised each other, never found fault—we knew only how to help, encourage and appreciate. We were closely knit together like one man. Suffering together, struggling, eating, working and talking together for years and years had given us an unnatural, unnaturally bound-up-together character. We could entertain no grievance and bear no ill-will against one another. We were ever conscious of the persistent need for fighting out our battles together. If one of us provoked an unnecessary quarrel with a jail employee, none of us would take exception or find fault. Thus five distinct persons, each with his own traits, had acquired a character above and beyond the character of each: there was a fusion of these five constituents, as it were, to form a compound which was neither of the five but a new entity, richer and larger.

Energetic Malik Kundan Lal was a man of broad features, great friendships, and far-fetched schemes. He was essentially a man of feeling and of passion, but here he had ever found less scope for his energies and had yielded to the inevitable; his volcanic personality had allowed layers of the ashes of prison life to settle on the glowing embers below and to hide their brilliance.

Swami Hans Raj, calm and deliberate, slow and steady, was the exact opposite of Malik Kundan Lal. He counterbalanced the hasty trustfulness of the Malik with his sound judgment which flowed, perhaps, from an innate scepticism. His disposition was that of a builder who gets together helping hands by dint of his amiable qualities and undertakes the completion of his constructive plan. But here in prison, he could make little use of his industrious and persevering though not exactly revolutionary qualities.

Pandit Kishori Lal, the man of strong conviction, unflinching resolution and unswerving ideals, had great capacity to adapt circumstances to his will though little capacity to change himself. Neither money, favour, nor consideration of any selfish gain could make any impression upon him. No facility or privilage, no good turn by an officer of the jail could possibly soften him where a principle was involved. He held his own feelings in check and would not allow the feelings of others to sway him. But this was his inner self: his outer qualities, of courtesy, of sociability, of goodwill stood between his convictions and the outside world which did not conform to his ideals and softened his implacability somewhat. Often enough he would just ignore an opinion or view opposed to his. He was by no means so serious-looking a man as the traits of his character would imply. Frequent, explosive laughter was a special feature of his carefree, consistent frame of mind; he was the jolliest of us all. One of his hobbies was pigeons, kept in a corner of the ward, and he was happy to see them fly.

Pandit Rupchand, with feeling as his guiding star, inclined to be meticulous in distinguishing between good and evil, between the noble and the mean, had been living more in the world of moonshine and poetry than in the world of reality. A book would make an altogether different being of him for days, even months. His taste for scientific books save him from evaporating into the starry firmament altogether. His keen interest in psychology and biology, and books on other scientific subjects had exerted a steadying influence upon him and given a rational basis to his thoughts. He always required an excellent book to brighten him up and otherwise remained dull and uncommunicative even to the point of being dubbed unsocial. His natural pessimism gave him a discerning objectivity about things, but to be always a hard realist was not in his line. His interest in literature had become exclusive, and that too, limited to a few authors, such as Tagore, Romain Rolland and Bernard Shaw, and he had decided preferences for persons, things—even

eatables. He had limited himself of his own free will and was, therefore, always in need for expansion. The jail atmosphere suited him less and he had acquired the defensive armour of indifference and disinterestedness to an extraordinary degree. He had even given up writing poetry and was nowadays occupied with books on dietetics and health as his indigestion had increased. He had given up rearing pets such as birds and squirrels, because they died at one time or another and left behind a trail of sadness.

They had all grown weary of the system of managing our kitchen by turns and I was left in permanent charge of it. Gardening had become a hobby with me. My ideal was to have harmony all round amongst us, and with those who came to keep company with us for limited periods. I aspired to manage things on a large scale. Fruit-growing, agriculture and vegetable-growing had lately become my favourite hobbies and I was reading books on these subjects.

At times we sat together like boatmen waiting for people to be ferried across, and talked of past events and of friends connected with them. Our memories quickened but they seldom went beyond the days of our advent into the prison. We felt as if we had alway sbeen there—the time before that was a blank, as it were. There were no regrets for the past, nor did the heaviness of the long imprisonment weigh upon our minds. But occasionally we thought of future and the experiences that were yet to come. The indfinite period of our sentence conditioned our wanderings into the future. Our release was so uncertain that it was never an immediate consideration before us, but the end of the war was the tentative end that we had fixed for our imprisonment. It was likely that we would get our freedom when the agony of the world would cease.

The Government had become panicky after the fall of France. Wholesale arrests all over the country were the result. More Socialist and Communist workers were sent to prison. Amongst hundreds of others, my brother S. Amrik Singh was arrested in

the United Provinces, and confined as a security prisoner. In our province six members of the Legislative Assembly were arrested on a single day. The arrested persons were being kept in various jails of the province.

First to come to our ward was Mr. Daniyal Latifi, Barrister at law, the son of a prominent I.C.S. Officer, who had held the post of Financial Commissioner. He was charged with pasting red posters on the walls somewhere in the city. He was an impressive young man, Communist by conviction, with new ideas and a striking new mode of living.

"I have arranged tea-making machinery," he informed us one day. The "machinery" arrived and we were curious to see how it worked. We had accepted his invitation to tea and went to his cell at the appointed time.

There was an ordinary kettle with a tea-set on the table and Mr. Latifi began to work at his "machinery" without manifesting any exceptional skill in mechanics. His touch was nevertheless gentle, and his way of handling things easy. His towel was machinery for wiping hands; his teaspoon was machinery for lifting sugar, and his sugar-pot the machinery for holding the sweet substance. Everything subject to the laws of motion was machinery, no doubt, but no machine could be as cultured and civilised as Mr. Latifi was.

We eagerly listened to what he told us about his life during his stay in England. His talk was very interesting when he was in a communicative mood.

Our ranks were swelling. Within a few days arrived Sardar Gopal Singh Qaumi, a well-known figure in the Punjab Congress circles. So far we had known him only by name. Possessed of a contagious frankness and familiarity, he befriended us on the very first day of his arrival. Within a few days a Mauji Club as well as committee—later called "Soviet"—for conducting our day-to-day affairs was shaped into being at his suggestion, and he was elected President of both. He had the natural capacity to take the leadership of all of us. The Mauji Club's pro-

gramme was merriment and frivolity; we had the liberty to make as much noise as we wished and laugh as much as we could. All serious talk was taboo.

Another addition to our society was Lala Karam Chand, Editor of the weekly *Paras*. The charge against him was that he had published a sensational poster giving the news of Mr. Churchill's arrest (which event, in fact, had taken place during the Bor War) with false implications.

At the jail gate he was ordered to be taken to the Terrorist Ward (also called Bomb Case Ward).

Lalaji objected to being taken there. He was an old Congressman who had always been against bomb-outrages by revolutionaries, and felt he would be in quite an embarrassing position in the society of such people. Their ward, too, had taken a name after them, which was terrifying. The officer concerned, taking Lalaji for a conscientious objector, suggested the *Siyasat Khana*. This name was appealing and Lalaji agreed to be taken there. He passed the night in a cell in the *Siyasat Khana*, which was nothing but an enclosure of a hundred punitive cells. He was not very comfortable there but had at least the satisfaction of not being locked up in the dangerous bomb-case ward.

In the morning Qaumiji met him and brought him along to see our place. He had a cursory look at our vegetable garden and fruit trees and smiled. He then inspected one of the cells and told us they were much better than those of the *Siyasat Khana*, which name was nothing but a snare. The word "*Siyasat*" means politics as well as grinding stones.

"Oh! we politically-minded people should always guard against falling into the trap of well-meaning words," exclaimed Lalaji and added, "Dirty mud walls, no light at all, and grinding stones without anything to grind sum up my politics of the last night!"

He obtained the necessary permission to join us the very same day. He was an elderly, calm and quiet person, very sympathetic towards us. For the few days that he was with us

he observed our habits, our way of living and studied our characters. He said nothing much to us even to the day of his release, but he never forgot us. An occasional interview or a gift in the form of a book or two, or some magazines and periodicals now and then sent by him to us were proof of his kindly attitude towards us. He published a series of articles in his paper relating his recent impressions about jail. These articles were remarkable for his insight into the psychology of the prisoners, with whom he had but a limited association for a few days.

CHAPTER XVI

"RED ARMY"

QAUMIJI was our undisputed leader. His very presence seemed sufficient to change the atmosphere around us. Energetic and vivacious as he was, he had brought new life to us. He was no less happy, for, as he declared merrily one day, here was leadership, however limited its scope, without the usual pin-pricks and the biting criticism. Who could help enjoying such carefree leadership ?

"We bet your followers shall increase day by day," remarked Pandit Kishori Lal, not without facts on his side. New arrests were being made. New people were joining us almost every day.

The Superintendent, a new man who had recently taken charge, provided us with the company of a non-political "B" class prisoner. This prisoner was creating much trouble in his own ward. In addition to being an informer against his own associates, he was possessed of a bellicose spirit of no small achievement to his credit. The prisoners in the "B" class ward were happy to get rid of him. We were not in an inhospitable mood and gave him a free run of the place. We did not want

him to form the impression that he was considered an undesirable element in our society. But he was of too proud a nature to suffer in silence the insult his associates had inflicted on him by turning him out of their ward. He told us that he wanted to go back.

The Superintendent came on parade and Malik Kundan Lal told him that the "B" class prisoner wanted to go back.

"It is no concern of yours," admonished the Superintendent sternly.

Malik Kundan Lal, nettled at this uncalled for rebuke, told the Superintendent that he was within his rights in voicing the "B" class prisoners' demand which was also the demand of all others confined in the Terrorist Ward.

"Shut up !" shouted the Superintendent angrily.

"I am not used to such threatening language," retorted the Malik.

"Take him to the punishment cells," ordered the Superintendent, and then stepped forward to inspect other cells. He reached Qaumiji who had heard everything from the verandah of his cell.

"You shall send not only Malik Kundan Lal but all of us to the cells because we all repeat what he has said to you !"

These words, firmly spoken by Qaumiji, made the Superintendent reflect for a moment. Qaumiji, moreover, informed him that we all demanded the turning out of the newcomer, though we had not had the slightest idea of doing so before.

The Superintendent was too angry to give any reply and moved towards other cells without even stopping to question the authority of Qaumiji for speaking on behalf of us all. The Deputy Superintendent remained behind to "pacify" Qaumiji. He said he would set matters right and give immediate orders for the Malik's being brought back from the cells.

"Why is the Superintendent so haughty ?" enquired Qaumiji with righteous indignation.

"You should treat the matter as a test of your patience," pleaded the Deputy, knowing full well the results of prolonging a quarrel in which the jail authorities were wholly in the wrong. He waited for the Superintendent to go out of the ward and then gave orders that Malik Kundan Lal be brought back and the "B" class prisoner be sent out. The latter was glad to return to his ward, a thing that could not have happened but for our forceful backing. The Superintendent had in reality tried, as every new officer does, to intimidate us if he could. We the old prisoners, had many such experiences but never did we have an advocate of such a personality and calibre as Qaumiji.

There was in the outside world great resentment against Government suppression of public opinion and civil liberties. The Communist workers who had joined us expected a widespread struggle to be launched by the All-India Congress Committee. They vehemently criticised the Congress decision to start the token movement of "individual *Satyagraha*" limited to specially selected persons for the purpose. The Communists declared it was merely sabotaging the mass movement for which there was great enthusiasm in the country.

On the 30th of November 1940, Mian Iftikharuddin, the first *Satyagrahi* in our Province and the president of the P.P.C.C. was arrested. The youthful President had been very sympathetic towards the political prisoners' cause and had issued several press statements in our favour in the days of the 1938 hunger-strike. It was a pleasant surprise to have him amongst us.

In the morning Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava, leader of the Opposition party in the Provincial Assembly, joined us. He had been taken into custody under Rule 26, D.I.R. Doctor Sahib's name was closely associated with the terrorist prisoners as he had from time to time come to their aid during the trials of their cases in courts and their subsequent struggles in jails, especially in the various hunger-strikes they had gone through

for improving their lot, and it was a matter of deep gratification to have him as a member of our society here.

Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, General Secretary of the P.P.C.C., joined us a few days later. Pandit Neki Ram Sharma and L. Bhim Sen Sachar, M.L.A., came when our ward was packed to the full and it was decided to turn our workingshed into a dwelling place for further arrivals. The influx of people continued and each cell was occupied by more than one person and, in some cases, three or four persons together. The cream of the nationalist circles of the province was here. Mr. Rajbans and the two brothers, comrades Mahmud and Mazhar, the student leaders of the city, and Mr. Panna Lal Aggarwal, a *Satyagrahi* from Lahore, were later added to our society. The accommodation problem became acute but in our happiness we thought nothing of such difficulties. What a grand 'family' we had now! We felt buoyed up and lifted to heights of cheerfulness. Our old unchanging world was wholly revolutionised. The old boatmen found themselves midstream, vigorously plying their oars, because a new life had come to lighten their hearts and brighten their outlook.

The organisation was renamed "Soviet" and its work given a broader basis. It was really amusing to find many newcomers admitted into the smaller but more busy and more clamorous organisation, the Mauji Club. A special feature of it was that those who did not join were not less sympathetic towards its aims and objects. A "Red Army" had come into being due to the efforts of Mr. Daniyal Latifi and held daily parades, in view of its having no bigger functions to perform. One day it raided the "house" of Pandit Neki Ram Sharma and confiscated a part of his property (eatables) on the ground of his absenting himself from the weekly meeting of the Soviet without any plausible excuse. It had really found some useful activity for itself and was enhancing it prestige day by day. An exercise party was organised under the aegis of the Red Army to keep its members in a state of fitness and health. Qaumiji, the president of both the organisations, had now a greater burden on his shoulders.

Lala Bhim Sen Sachar was given a separate cell, as a special case. He was a very impressive personality, with regular non-interfering habits. He would himself see to the cleanliness of his cell, dust even the iron bars of the doors with his own hands, and spin, exercise and pray with enviable regularity. He was greatly interested in garden work and we both occupied ourselves in it from eight to nine in the morning every day. We talked as we worked, and I was much impressed by his way of thinking. He would always try to understand another's point of view and never force his own upon others. He had a simple way of tackling complicated problems of life.

Our interest had been largely transferred from books to men and from jail politics to the politics of the outside world. Here were patriotic men belonging to different faiths, ideologies and creeds, all united in the common struggle for the country's freedom. They held discussions on political issues, on their future programmes and mutual understanding about how best to help one another. They might have had differences of the past to bridge over but we five, who had not all these considerations before us, wished only to benefit by their valuable company. Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and I believed in Socialism but it was not advisable to declare our adherence to any party. Pandit Kishori Lal and Swami Hans Raj were definitely inclined towards the Communist Party, but they, too, tried to behave as non-partymen without any prejudice against followers of other parties.

I was strongly of the opinion that there should be no parties among us in jail. The prisoners should be treated all alike. Sachar Sahib's social demeanour was the ideal I had before me. He always looked to me irreproachable and faultless. Our social life went on smoothly to the complete forgetfulness of the hampering influence of prison conditions.

CHAPTER XVII

QUAMIJI LOSES HIS SHOES

SARDAR PARTAP SINGH KAIRON, M.L.A., was transferred from Amritsar jail. I found him to be a man of quick intelligence and unusually sharp acumen, especially in weighing men. In a few days it seemed he understood us far better than we did ourselves. His observations and remarks were expressive of an uncommonly keen interest in men and their affairs. He talked straight from his heart as it were, and everything he said had a ring of sincerity. We were soon intimate with him till it seemed there was no distance between us whatsoever—as if we were comrades of long standing. He could thus win one over so completely and inspire so much trust and affection because of the ready sympathy that he possessed in larger abundance than anyone I have known, you felt that he not only knew your worries and troubles but also shared them—that they were his far more that they were yours. This sympathy again, led to wisdom, for wise he was in the ways of the world. Another secret of his charm was the magic of his clear, bold, untrammelled thought. A double M.A., well-read, with a wealth of well-digested ideas, he had the art of keeping us engaged in intellectual give-and-take without any feeling of heaviness, for while discussing serious things he could create an atmosphere of most natural and easy understanding, sparkling with scintillating wit and humour.

One could not help noticing that he preferred the company of modest, poor workers to that of the rich and influential ones. His words were charged with the warmth, affection and richness of a genial gracious nature free from pettiness and sweetened by a rare catholicity of temperament. His criticism always had about it a quality of enlightenment, for it was never personal, never vicious, never unjust. He had amazing resilience of understanding, a ready pragmatism that spurned all dogmatic narrowness and looked each problem in the face, tackling it as one tackles an individual. Without knowing it, he had about him

the way of social success, for he could nestle his way into your heart in no time through his sheer sincerity towards you.

I found him amazingly well-informed. You could talk with him on any subject, any matter of interest ranging from important political issues or literacy topics, to the small matters of ordinary human conduct, and find his knowledge adequate and views refreshing and stimulating. I sensed about him a rare dynamism:he seemed capable of continuous growth, and one felt that the rigidities that, sooner or later, invade our thinking and feeling apparatus as much as our bones and make physical as well as mental fossils of us, would never be able to cripple his spirit. It is difficult to find such an all-understanding friend even in the world of the free where one has so much to choose from, but we were lucky enough to find such a one in the narrow confines of jail.

There were now more than sufficient players for outdoor games. Volleyball was played outside our ward, for lack of space inside. We, the old prisoners, for the first time saw what the place around our ward looked like. Beyond the *Siyasat Khana* was the jail garden and water reservoir. One day we went in the company of some Congress leaders to the water tank and climbed upstairs to its roof and looked at the people gathered on the race-course *maidan* and on the road, passing by. It was a novel experience and had a wondrous effect upon us. The distance between the free and the imprisoned worlds was only a few hundred yards, and queerly enough, the air was the same but not those who breathed it. It would have looked so boyish to have kept looking at this view for long, and so I came down, but my eyes still retained the impression of a broad, limitless view as if of fairyland.

Raizada Hans Raj, the veteran Congress leader of the province, was more than seventy but had offered satyagraha and courted arrest in spite of his years. He still had enough of the spirit of youth and could exchange a joke with any of the young men present there. He worked at the spinning wheel, took part in

the activities of the Mauji Club, and showed a lively interest in the meetings of the Soviet. He was suffering from diabetes and heart trouble and had to be sent to Mayo Hospital for diagnosis and treatment.

Qaumiji's new country-made shoes had arrived more than a month earlier. He would slip his feet in the new pair while going to the jail gate for an interview and take it off on his return automatically as he would change into his usual clothes—a shirt and a kachha—ordinarily worn in the ward. He would then come out of his cell smiling or laughing, his dilapidated and outworn shoes slipping at ease beneath his feet and giving out short creaking sounds.

Another month or so passed and the new shoes too began to show signs of aging, but it seemed Qaumiji had no idea that the process of aging, which applied to all things, applied equally well to the things in his possession.

The old shoes continued to be much in evidence. A good natured smile or a frank laugh was sure to greet you if you passed by Qaumiji or observed him from a distance. He was fond of sugar and gur. No one living in the ward could fail to see sometime in the day his venerable figure bent over a small bag of gur or a smaller but more evenly filled one of sugar, helping himself to a handful. He suffered from diabetes, but that did not deter him from following dictates of his palate, nor did he ever contemplate sacrificing his sweet tooth at the altar of medical advice. When one or two prison-mates entered his cell, he would offer a lump of the sweet stuff each, but when a large number got in, he would naturally feel somewhat uneasy at the predatory intentions writ large upon their faces and the wheedling words of beggary on their lips. He, however, did not know how to hide his sweet things. One could detect at one glance his precious stores. His cell was as candid as he himself.

In a similar way, he could not conceal or camouflage his desire for leadership, for a vast multitude of faithful followers

spread over the whole of the country, for joy, for pleasure. Desires oozed out of his heart in a serene, sparkling, bubbling flow.

Qaumiji was evidently gifted with an extraordinary capacity for a successful compromise between extremes. His uncommon expressiveness, his unusual oratorial powers and the exceptional friendliness of spirit flowed from this trait. Not only men but things, too, received a share of his sympathy. That is why he did not know what to do one morning when he found his old shoes missing. He searched for them high and low till noon, but in vain. Friends had come to him to condole with him at his grievous loss, to commiserate with him at the grievously wasteful tendencies of the criminal who had perpetrated the heinous crime and to give him valuable suggestions and clues as to the probable culprit who had stolen them and thrown them away. All this amounted naturally to the creation of an atmosphere of hilarity in which the real issue was altogether forgotten and the precious shoes remained untraced.

I saw him sitting in his cell in a somewhat resigned but in no way melancholy mood, weaving a thread of intimate thoughts in his mind.

The disappearance of the pair of shoes was by now an established fact. The idea that the thing was gone forever must have made him somewhat philosophical as was evident from the jocular expression on his face as he looked at me.

I had an equally philosophical expression on my face, for I was contemplating the supreme question of the day: "Why did not Qaumiji throw away the shoes much earlier? Why was another's help necessary to relieve him of these shoes?"

My studied silence was, however, accentuated by a broad grin. I allowed him ample time to review undisturbed the whole situation to his heart's content, for I walked away from his side and went out of the ward for a walk on the road in front of it.

The sugar that Qaumiji ate was shared by others but no one seemed anxious to share with him the loss of the ancient shoes,

presumably because they were considered his exclusive preserve, especially in their tattered old age. In laying stress upon our relations with living things we are always prone to forget the importance of inanimate objects which serve us. The sense of security, faithfulness and comfort exuded by them is lost upon us. Perhaps Qaumiji was thinking of this aspect of the question. Probably he remembered the day when he had first used the shoes. There was the gold work above the toe and the leather was pleasantly coloured and soft. These shoes had a short history but a long period of service. They had been hidden on many previous occasions as well but had always been restored to Qaumiji. Many a night had he awakened from sleep and found his feet searching in vain for their covering. Once they were a tight fit, then they had become comfortably adapted to his feet. They had been lately demanding considerable effort on his part to enable them to keep company with him for use while going to and coming from the bathroom. Perhaps he wished to carry them with him from prison on his release so that they may be preserved for future generations, but maybe his children would have thrown them away.

Coming back into the ward I saw that the topic had not exhausted itself. Qaumiji was examining and cross-examining a number of suspects to the accompaniment of great roars of laughter.

Another case was instituted against Qaumiji and he was transferred to the jail in Multan as the trial was to take place in that city. We noted with regret that the activities of the Mauji Club dwindled almost to nothing in his absence.

Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava was elected President of the Soviet in place of Qaumiji. There were several "C" class prisoners in our ward, while there were others in various parts of the jail. About ten or twelve were given the cells in the outer portion of the *Siyasat Khana*. The Government had created a difficult problem for Doctor Sahib and the Congress leaders in the ward by its differential treatment of political prisoners. Doctor Sahib

was trying to solve this intricate problem with tact, sympathy and care. He pleaded for the same facilities for the "C" class prisoners as were allowed to those in the "A" and "B" classes. The jail authorities had, through his persistent efforts, agreed to allow the food for the prisoners in the *Siyasat Khana* to be cooked in the common kitchen of our ward.

They were also given the facility of association with us and permission to play volley-ball. But the difference between "C" class and better class prisoners still remained. In additions to inequality regarding clothing, bedding, etc., there was the question of the differential treatment by the jail authorities which could never be in conformity with the self-respect and dignity of the "C" class political prisoners. There was also the psychological factor of their feeling themselves in a disadvantageous and lower position. Some friends were satisfied at what was being done for them and others were not. Bad feeling and bitterness to a degree was inevitable. The better-class prisoners too were in unhappy position. It was an old question for the solution of which many struggles and long hunger-strikes had been resorted to. "One class for all" was the demand that had been repeatedly made by the prisoners but the Government had not conceded it. Many had given up their classes as a protest against the inequality of status but the bureaucracy knew its game of creating divisions and would not do the right thing. The question was very touchy and all the efforts for its solution by conscientious sacrifices and considerate acts of the better-placed prisoners had so far failed.

Dr. Gopi Chand had suffered imprisonment in every national movement launched by the Congress and we were deeply touched by the gratifying fact that he could think as the old prisoners thought and feel as they felt. He never gave way to the authorities on a single matter of common interest and pressed for more and more facilities for all of us. As our President, he had to look after our requirements and act as our spokesman with the officers. There was no difficulty of ours that could not be

solved through his patient and careful handling of our affairs. Mindful of the minutest details he showed a keen interest in every problem and a sympathetic understanding of every difficulty that demanded solution.

A new "A" or "B" class prisoner, who has never seen the jail before can take life as it is and be indifferent to minor facilities but the old prisoner knows that he had been evolved and shaped by struggles and that valuation has always changed with the conditions of life. We could fully appreciate the efforts of Doctor Sahib in the light of our experiences.

We may sum up the past thus: every improvement in our condition was the result of a struggle; every struggle was made possible by a unified purpose; this unified purpose was actuated by the desire for a better future. We had to conform to the dictates of our broadening life.

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CHAPTER XVIII

1942 REVOLUTION

THERE was now a regular influx and outflux of Congress prisoners. Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, M.L.A., Lala Onkar Nath, Municipal Commissioner, and Lala Brij Krishan Chandiwala of Delhi, had been in the Gujarat special jail. They were transferred from there along with Chaudhri Krishan Gopal Datt of Sialkot. Guptaji was not demonstrative in expressing sympathy, love or affection. The deep penetrating quality of his vocal sympathy reminded me of Lala Sham Lal. Lala Onkar Nath's youthful friendliness of spirit was contagious; Lala Brij Krishan's regular, neat and clean habits closely resembled those of Sachar Sahib. Conscientiousness, purity of living and capacity for suffering were the first impressions that I got even as I shook hands with him. He remained with us for a short period but those impressions have lingered. Chaudhri Sahib was an amateur homeopath and was introduced to us as an able exponent of that science. Swami Hans Raj improved upon this yet insufficient introduction, as he belonged to his district.

Raizada Hans Raj had returned from the Mayo Hospital. The Red Army that contained enthusiastic young men like the two Nawabzadas, Mahmud and Mazhar, and Daniyal gave him a royal reception at the gate of the ward. He added to our amusement by freely participating in it. The condition of his health was, however, grave and it was expected that he would be released shortly on medical grounds. Thanks to his efforts a radio-set was installed in our ward before the orders for his release came.

Talkies and radio-sets were the latest inventions popularised after we had been arrested. We had discussed the question of having an opportunity to enjoy a talkie and listen to a radio. "Would the Government give us a day of freedom for that on the condition that it added a month to our imprisonment?" I asked one day. Qaumiji thought over the matter for a while and replied, "No, but if you could offer a year in exchange for a

single day's indulgence it might appeal to them." This way, however, we would never get out of jail at all, because we were willing to pay even a higher price. Anyway, the offer was only of academic interest as utter indifference of the Government to what we felt shut out the possibility of any such offer receiving any thought. The radio set had arrived without any conditions. The first song that we heard was (लूट लियौ मन धीर) "*Loot liyo man dhir*" sung by Kanan Devi. What a revolution had come about in the instrumental and vocal music of our country! The song penetrated into my being like the undulating, heaving waves of a flood. The ease with which it affected me was marvellous; the power with which it held me was of the nature of magic. If the thrill and the rapture brought about by this song be perpetuated, nothing would remain to be desired in life.

I did not know that this song had been sung by the best songstress of Bengal. I realised the extent to which soul would starve for want of music. So far I had only read books and appreciated ideas. A writer's sole task is to stimulate thought. A good song, on the other hand, makes our heart beat blindly and feverishly to the tune of the great harmony that prevails in the universe. An idea is an internal stimulus that moves us sometimes to action, but a song coming from outside envelopes our being in the process and makes our self as large as the Universe. But it awakons a kind of hunger for eternity. I have listened to many a good song and have always had a feeling resembling hunger rather than satisfaction. Sometimes strong sometimes weak emotions of various colours tend to fill the vacuum; the soul is exercised to a general awakening. My said tastes, hungers, sympathies touch the surface of consciousness and vanish. The dream is broken again and again and yet it continues.

The release of individual *Satyagrahi* prisoners had begun. Some had short sentences. Successful amicus curiæ petitions had been filed on behalf of some. Qaumiji had come back from Multan but he was transferred to the Borstal Jail after a short time. So went Mr. Daniyal Latifi. The student leaders were

a happy lot. They had added much to our life by their friendly spirit. They too were set free one by one. Dr. Gopi Chand, Mr. Sachar, Mian Iftikharuddin and many important personalities had gone out. Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, having a longer sentence (two years), remained behind.

The place vacated by the outgoing Congress leaders was filled by the "C" class prisoners who had been confined in the outer portion of *Siyasat Khana.* The friction between the "C" class and the "B" class prisoners that had to an extent, marred our happiness for a time in the past, was nowhere to be seen now. S. Partap Singh Kairon, the man who loved to share his meals with the ordinary volunteers and workers and was more happy in their company than in that of influential, well-to-do people; had created an ideal atmosphere in our ward. This great quality had brought him closer to us than anyone so far: he aroused a friendship and a devotion that few could manage to call forth.

The release of the *Satyagrahis* had not yet begun when one day one of our friends, an old terrorist, who had been released was rearrested and again brought in. I told Sardarji that our friend had been in this ward before and we would now be six in place of five.

"You are wrong there. He won't associate with you now. He will prefer the company of the members of the party he has joined."

This opinion of Sardarji surprised me. I had never seen him make an observation of such a nature before and wanted to know more of his mind.

"How can such an intimate friend of ours associate less with us?" I asked.

"There are parties in politics and no non-party men," observed Sardarji.

I did not fully understand him. It was difficult for me to believe that our old friend would prefer the company of his rich Party-members and forget that his proper place was with us. But the friend showed us no more of his former cordiality and was

even shy of our company like a stranger. The rich members of his party were on the most familiar terms with us, but not he, Sardarji had proved a shrewder judge of character than the man's old colleagues!

Sardarji was one of the few prominent leaders who would never try to obtain facilities from jail authorities, nor would he ever try to set up friendly relations with them on the basis of his prominent position so that he may derive personal advantage. I could see that he regarded any use of personal influence as a sort of fall from an ideal—the only way he knew was to wrest informs from the authorities on the strength of mass support and united will. He was essentially a fighter, and a fearless, valiant fighter at that. His wisdom, patience and capacity to see both sides of the picture were expressive of his democratic spirit, but this never weakened his will to fight, never caused any vacillation. He could see his opponent's view-point without softening his attack.

His release left a void that could not be filled. He had left a lasting impression that made us turn towards him in our mind again and again, and we kept up an uncommon interest in his work outside. In his letters to us were words of goodwill, and his letters came regularly.

There were hundreds of prisoners now Socialists, Communists, old terrorists, Congressites and others arrested in the province and confined in the jails at Multan, Ambala, Montgommery, Mian-wali, Gujarat, Sialkot, Ferozepur, Jhang, Lyallpur, Lahore, etc. Most of them were ordinary "C" class prisoners and were treat-ed even more harshly, because of a stricter application of the rules in their case.

A concentration camp at Deoli, an out-of the way place about seventy miles from Ajmer and nearly as many miles from the nearest railway station, was opened to provide "safe" deten-tion for a large number of security prisoners as those detained without trial in open court were called. Those who were sent

there from the Punjab Jails were, with the exception of some, placed in Division II—a standard approximately equal to that of "C" class prisoners. They were under the control of a military guard. The arrangements about their food, medical treatment and interviews were in no way satisfactory and they could, in such a place, rarely avail themselves of their right to have interviews. The prisoners put forth a united demand that all should be sent back to their respective provinces and the distinction between I and II Divisons abolished in favour of a uniform classification. They were eventually forced to back their demand with the declaration of hunger-strike. There was a widespread agitation in the country and Mahatma Gandhi's statements issued in support of their demands were exceptionally critical of the Government's repressive policy. Better treatment was at last promised and the prisoners sent back to their respective provinces. Those belonging to the Punjab were mostly sent to the Gujarat Special Jail.

Now and then a sick security-prisoner from Gujarat or another jail requiring expert medical treatment at the Mayo Hospital would be transferred to Lahore Central Jail and sent back when the treatment ended. There was thus a steady flow of prisoners in our ward. Some were old friends, others not previously known to us. Some were cured and went back; a good many of them were sent back without appreciable improvement in their health.

Germany attacked Russia in May 1941. The fate of the Socialist fatherland hung in the balance. The Communist friends were naturally perturbed. They feared it was done to gain the sympathies of Western domocracies, especially England, and turn the character of the war into an anti-Bolshevist crusade. They had no faith in the imperialist powers like Britain. They had been severely critical of the individual Satyagraha campaign of the Congress and clamouring for a mass struggle to wrest power from the British imperialists. Then came Prime Minister Churchill's offer of unconditional help to Russia. America and

Britain in fact began to give genuine help. The Communists now felt that the character of the war had changed and declared it a "Peoples' War." So also did the Communist Party of India, offering unconditional support in the war effort. The Indian National Congress on the other hand was of the opinion that Indian help would be genuinely forthcoming only if Indians were given freedom enough to organise it. National honour demanded that we take part in the war not as unwilling slaves but free partners. Britain had turned down all demands for the establishment of a responsible government at the centre. There was the sense of frustration and despair in the masses whose anti-British feelings were growing day by day. The Congress as a democratic body, could never hope to rouse the enthusiasm of the common people of the country unless they were given a great cause, the assurance of their own independence, to fight for. They needed the glow of freedom, it said, in order to make willing sacrifice for the Allied Nations.

Japanese entry into the war in December 1941, their subsequent overrunning of the Far Eastern countries, and their easy victories bringing them into Burma alarmed the British politicians. They decided upon a policy of appeasing nationalist forces in India and sent one of the Cabinet Ministers, Sir Stafford Cripps with an offer to give India self-government after the war. The Cripps proposals fell far short of nationalist aspiration and as far as they were concerned with the defence of the country amounted to giving Indians the right to organise canteens and propaganda through pamphlets and leaflets for the duration of the war. All the major political parties rejected them and Sir Stafford went back with words of bitter condemnation for the Indian leaders.

With the fate of former British promises in the background, the Congress could not but be sceptical of any liberal plans for the future and wanted effective powers for the present as a proof of the bona fides of the British statesmen. The country was seething with unrest. The war conditions and drastic measuress

curbing the civil liberties of the people, the food shortage and the untold miseries of the people, added fuel to the fire. The Congress asked the British to go, putting forth the famous "Quit India" demand. The British and he American armed forces were to remain in India to conduct the war against Japan and leave as soon as the war ended. The Congress leaders further clarified their intentions of meaning no harm to the war effort. On the 8th of August 1942, the "Quit India" resolution was passed in the A.I.C.C. meeting held in Bombay authorising Mahatma Gandhi to negotiate with the Viceroy and start a mass struggle for the acceptance of the demand, if the negotiations bore no favourable results.

Mahatma Gandhi and the members of the Working Committee were arrested on the 9th August. The Government had decided to crush the Congress. They did not give Mahatmaji any chance for negotiations. Wholesale arrests began. The masses were provoked to violence and fury at the arrest of their leaders. There were simultaneous uprisings all over the country, resulting in large-scale sabotage, burning of railway stations, post offices, up-rooting of railway lines, cutting of telephone and telegraph wires, etc. In several places the British Raj had come to an end and the people had set up their own government. The military and the police shot down the mobs. They were machine-gunned from aeroplanes as the Government themselves admitted later on. Burning of villages by the police and beating of men and women suspects, imposition of collective fines and confiscation of property were some of the drastic measures adopted as a rule by the Government and their agents. Thousands of people were killed.

The Muslim League had declared that the movement was aimed against Muslims, and enjoined upon the brethren of their faith to take no part in it. Accept Pakistan, and recognise the Muslim League as the sole representative body of the Mussalmans of India, demanded the League. Their opposition to the Congress was due to their belief that it was not a national organisation common to all communities but a Hindu Body. The "Quit India" resolution was opposed on the same ground.

The Communists opposed the resolution and the 1942 movement because of their declared policy of giving unconditional help in the prosecution of the war. They also wholeheartedly supported the Muslim League ideology of two nations, the Muslim and the Hindu. The trio of communism, communalism and bureaucracyheld the field while those who could speak for the Congress were all behind bars. The politics of the country was vitiated and the constitutional deadlock continued. The organisation that had fought continuously for the independence of India, by fair means and above-board methods, was going through a period of severe trial. Its leaders were given no chance of speaking their minds on the recent happenings in the country. Had they been out they could have checked the violence of the people. The prisoners of the 1942 movement were neither allowed interviews nor letters and were treated worse than ordinary criminals.

Our province had been the quietest in comparison with the rest of the country, but two thousand arrests took place here. There was no kid-glove dealing with the Congress prisoners, no recognition of the public position of the eminent leaders of the organisation. All were to be treated as rebels, as the 1942 movement was virtually a rebellion directly aimed at casting aside the British yoke.

The fury of the masses continued unabated for more than six months and then began to show signs of subsiding. The field was in the hands of the Communists and Muslim League. The "Peoples' War" propaganda of the former and the Pakistan demand of the latter were gaining momentum and nationalist India was in the thrœs of a bitter struggle. Resentment against both the slogans knew no limits as both were taken to be a stab in the back, an invidious attack on the forces of nationalism in its darkest hour of trial. There was growing co-operation among the anti-Congress forces. British statesmen encouraged opposition to the Congress. Fascist, pro-Japanese, unprogressive, were the adjectives freely used against the Congress leaders. They had no opportunity of replying to false insinuations against them.

The proportions that the struggle took had made it a veritable war of independence carried on in the absence of the leaders.

It had its repercussions on our minds. The upheaval in the country had shaken us to the depths. "Which side?" was the question that rose in the mind of every individual behind bars. Bitter discussions were a matter of daily occurrence. Verbal clashes of viewpoints, national and international outlooks and ideologies told upon social relations to a considerable extent. Arguments seemed to possess an extraordinary power of creating divisions and widening gulfs.

"Why should you, the most progressive party as you call yourself, use what influence you have for the divison of India instead of going on with the non-communal programme for the betterment of the working classes and the peasantry?" asks a Congressman.

The Communist replies, "Let the Mussalmans unite under the banner of the Muslim League. That is the only way of removing their suspicions and inducing them to believe that they will have Pakistan."

"Why does not the idea of a national organisation such as the Congress, fighting for the welfare of Hindus and Muslims alike, appeal to you?" retorts the Congressman.

"Face the facts. The Congress has been a Hindu organisation and should become clearly so. The Muslims who are still in it will go over to the League. It is inevitable," says the Communist by way of warning.

"Hindus going to the Hindu Mahasabba, Muslims to the Muslim League, Sikhs to the Sikh communal organisation, and so on, till not a volunteer is left to work for the common welfare of all communities under the banner of the Congress is what you are aiming at. Why are you so bitter against us?" questions the Congressite.

The discussion was still in progress when a Socialist joined in.

"Thousands of our people have been shot down with bullets. They demanded a national government to be in charge of the war effort. So does the whole of the country. Is it the Peoples' war for us?" he asked.

Pandit Rupchand, usually a calm and quiet person, without seeing the impropriety of intrusion, asks under the spur of emotion, "Supposing we here start a struggle against the jail authorites. We may be partly wrong but the struggle has begun, would it be meet for an old companion like you to side with the jail authorities ?"

He made the already critical situation more critical.

We avoid discussion, and try to raise no political issues, but at times the spirit of controversy gets the better of one or more of us. There are even differences of view among the five of us. We steer clear of the path of argument but are not so cautious with the rest of the comrades. Our old terrorist friends, most of whom have joined the Communist Party and are now confined in the Gujarat Jail, have sent word to us that we should declare for the Communists' policy. The sick friends who had brought the message are going back. The five of us have given replies that are not identical as Pandit Kishori Lal and Swami Hans Raj are Communists, while Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and I are not.

The realisation is upon me that there was a lot of difference between the organisation of the secret and open parties. We in the Terrorist Party enlisted only a select few and rejected even the best type of men who were not expected to work wholeheartedly on violent lines. But the various parties try to rope in as many members as they can. There is a race for creating a majority. No one sees to the merit of the workers who are to be enrolled. Success is a rare thing but efforts continue.

Politics is largely based upon hatred. One limits oneself not to a party but to its hatreds, loves, jealousies, fanaticism, blindness, and defiance of all that is not within the pale of party interests. The more truth the opposite side brings into an argu-

ment, the more it injures. The more sense one has at one's command, the more dulling effect one produces. The roots of every party are deep with the capacity to utilise the filthiest water only for the tree that is at the head of them. Canvassing with the branches is only a useless activity giving off superfluous heat.

All the atmosphere is conciliatory and timidly peaceful when a sudden militant cry is raised by someone. It is met with a counter cry. Unpleasantness is always the result. It makes me feel still more strongly that there ought to be no parties in jail but only prisoners making united efforts towards improvement of the prison conditions.

Discussion naturally lost heat with the passage of time. The efforts at making new converts were now directed towards only a wavering few. There was, for example, the case of two ex-policemen from Hong Kong, now detained as security prisoners in our ward. They joined the Communist Party, with the object amongst others of obtaining their release. The Government had in fact released several prominent Communists and more releases of the members of the Party were expected in response to their policy of support in the war effort. Later on both the ex-policemen, who had no political views at all, allowed their connection with the Communists to lapse. One of them told me quite frankly that his objective was release and nothing more.

A new Communist prisoner came from Ferozepore Jail and I asked him about the health of Mr. M., an old friend of mine who was now a Communist, and was reported to be suffering from tuberculosis.

"You may be thinking of some other Mr. M.," he replied adding that, "no Communist could suffer from such a disease."

The new friend was evidently a man of strong faith and needed no light of reason.

"We have come committing arson, and shall go committing arson," was the cry with which a 1942 prisoner entered the gate of our ward.

He became a friend of mine because of the favourable impression the name of a terrorist gave him. "What do you think of terrorism?" he asked me one day.

"My thoughts have changed," I replied calmly.

"Thoughts cannot change," he said, flaring up. "I can swallow every idle tale, but not the one which conveys the impression that your thoughts have changed. You could not be a revolutionary then."

"They change with the situation or what you may call environment," I explained.

"But could environment make a reactionary out of you?" he asked sternly.

"I am not dead certain that it cannot."

These words of mine enraged him. He protested againt the expression of any doubt. "For myself," he declared, "I am sure I shall make bombs always, in the revolution, after the revolution. . . ."

"For what purpose, may I ask ?" I inquired.

He realised he had said something very strong and impracticable, and calming down a little explained that there were seven lakhs of villages in our country which must be organised.

I asked him how he reconciled village uplift work with bomb-making. He reflected for a moment and said, "All they need being taught is to use force . . . a blind irrepressible force, and that is my programme for the revolutionaries."

"The act of revolution is not to use the maximum but minimum force and thus succeed where success seems impossible! Caution, my friend, is the word for you," I argued.

I had been lately exclusively occupied in reading Communist literature. Never had I anything but deep admiration for the great experiment that Russia had undergone for the sake of

humanity. I had firmly believed in the cause of Russian victory but differed from the policy of the Indian Communists on the "Pakistan" and "People's War" issues. The books were of little help to me in showing the error, if there was any, in my convictions.

How the books have increased and go on increasing indefinitely whereas minds or men capable of understanding them do not in the same proportion! Party men, as they are in politics, have generally no mind. They grasp some truths partially. Ideas slip into their heads out of simplicity and forceful clarity, but as to the details and deeper philosophy behind, they are dull and authoritative. As if some irreglur unshapely weapons get into the hands of some with which they fight head foremost. They are the followers, typical followers, lacking the calmness of vision and intellect, who do not understand that most of the philosophical ideas they carry are a burden on their minds, a cause of more dissatisfaction with their opponents than is meet and preportionate.

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CHAPTER XIX

FRIENDS COME AND GO ; ONE DEPARTS FOREVER !

MR. MUHAMMAD YAMIN DAR, Babu Muhammad Din of Lahore, Agha Shorish Kashmiri, S. Kultar Singh, Professor Tilak Raj Chadha of Rawalpindi, and many other comrades had one by one come to swell our ranks. Our ward was limited to security prisoners and convicted prisoners. Doctor Gopi Chand, Mr. Virendra of *Partap*, Lahore, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, Maulana Daud Gaznavi, Diwan Chaman Lal, Sardar Atma Singh of Sheikhupura, Seth Sudershan, Jathedar Chanan Singh, Lala Raghunandan Saran and Lala Onkar Nath of Delhi and other prominent political leaders had one by one come to our jail for medical treatment but they were kept separate from us in two different wards. The inhuman conditions under which they had been living had visibly told upon their health. Some of them were suffering from serious diseases. L. Raghunandan Saran and L. Deshbandhu Gupta were suffering from diseases of the nervous system which defied all treatment.

There were numerous convicted prisoners who had taken active part in the sabotage campaign. We could not meet all of them because they were kept as ordinary criminals in different "C" class barracks. The leaders and some of the convicted prisoners told us harrowing tales of Government repression, of firing on unarmed peaceful mobs, of attacks on the honour of women, and so on. The masses had gone through tremendous suffering. The mutiny of 1857 paled into insignificance before this conflagration which had just outwardly subsided but inwardly continued to smoulder in the hearts of millions of our countrymen. They had only demanded to turn the war into a People's war for Indians and learnt to their cost that imperialist Britain would not have it.

The sick prisoners from the three political wards went in turn to the Mayo Hospital for treatment as the accommodation

arrangements there allowed, and came back. Those who were cured were transferred to their respective jails, the others remained.

Professor Tilak Raj Chadha, a young intellectual from my district, was suffering from diseases gall-bladder and appendicitis. He was liable to fits of excruciating pain because of the troubles. His digestion had failed, his health broken down. He had daily temperature. Continued incarceration since the beginning of the war had sapped his energies. He lost in flesh but gained in spirit. More sympathetic towards the other sick comrades than the healthy ones, more careful of the sentiments of others than anyone of us, he seemed to carry on as if there was nothing wrong with his health. He had to undergo two major operations. His life was at stake. He was the type of young man who stakes his life for a noble cause and never gives importance to his physical well-being. He had a variety of interests and a versatile mind. It was a pleasure to talk to him. His exceptional sociable qualities had earned for him the respect of all irrespective of party affiliations and propaganda campaigns. He brought a healthy influence to bear upon matters relating to our social life. I usually tried to interest him in the dietetic method of the famous American, Dr. Kellogg. He tried various suggestions but his diseases were in too far advanced a stage to yield to changes in the diet.

Comrade Muhammad Yamin Dar had hernia and appendicitis in addition to various other troubles. He was "fiery, tempestuous and a friend of friends" type of man. A comrade of lesser abilities would quail before the mighty onrush of his words. He would let heat into an argument and loved to rush the matter into an extreme and then turn the whole thing into a joke. Perhaps it was an exceptional power of "timely recovery" of his.

We came to know him as a man of emotion, of sentiments that gave stability and faithfulness to his character. "Good

society and improved environment had taken the edge off our bellicosity," said I, and he confessed that he doubted whether there was in him even a needful quantity of the useful stuff that was abundant in the days of his youth. His stormy character had indeed acquired steadfastness and ripeness of wisdom that was of great help to us in our day-to-day problems. His sarcasm and bantering tone were resented by no one. He had the knack of making himself familiar with those who showed natural reserve and lack of cordiality.

S. Kultar Singh had the coolest of temperaments ever found in an energetic and lively young man. His portly figure enhanced the effect of his congenial disposition and conciliatory habits.

These newly arrived young men had added charm to our society.

In the spring of 1943, we were one morning told the tragic news of the death of a "C" class 1942 prisoner in the jail hospital. We had neither heard his name nor of his being in the jail and were for the first and last time acquainted with him only at his death.

"Devi" belonged to Delhi district ; he was a prisoner of the August disturbances. This was the meagre introduction of him given by another prisoner belonging to Delhi. No one could tell us more about his life and his work.

Death becomes a more terrible word to a prisoner because his mind and heart tend to become more susceptible to injuries and shocks. Here was no case of a simple death but that of extreme penalty for the offence of patriotism.

The man from Delhi district lay in the mortuary which was nothing more than a few dirty mud-berths protected by a dingy roof supported by frayed, time-beaten, dirt-beaten walls impervious to the influence of whitewash. The smell of decomposition greeted us as we stood at the door. He lay upon a rag like wretched hospital blanket, a black, bloodless, fleshless human

being with thin and longish bones. A poorer "C" class dress, consisting of a redlined shirt, short like a banian, and pyjamas hardly reaching below his knees, adorned his body. His mien was humble, his features drawn and emaciated and his eyes haggard and open. He had died from loss of blood, though lack of nourishment was the only cause of his death. A quantity of milk and curds and butter and fruits would have saved his life. The doctor could have stopped his bleeding with a little more care and effort, which he evidently did not expend.

"Devi" was so helpless, so unassuming, so resigned as to die without uttering a word of protest against the lack of proper treatment and bearable conditions in the jail. If a prisoner wants to have a packet of cigarettes, or an ounce of butter or half a pound of milk in addition to what the rules permit him, he must have recourse to smuggling. Another method is bribing the doctor or a jail official. Both the methods require money. It was certain that "Devi" had no money, or he would have managed to live. No one could die of bleeding piles in a few days, nor the bleeding continues for more than a limited period. Perhaps writing off his life was in his blood and he had no urge to live under the wretched prison conditions.

We were too deeply moved at the moment to apportion blame for indifference towards his life on the medical or the executive authorities. The foreign rule against which we were fighting was the root-cause of all our misfortunes. We did not talk but all were evidently thinking on the same lines.

We brought flowers from the garden of our ward ; the jail employees brought the shroud. "Devi" was wrapped up in it. We showered flowers upon him. How weak he was, lighter even than a child. But he was strong in death which he had bravely met. A poor man whom no one knew, had made an immense sacrifice and admirably acquitted himself of the burden of slavery that hung heavily over his lean shoulders.

His emaseuated lean figure wrapped up in death and sprinkled with flowers was ready for the fire—we carried him to the jail gate—and he became smoke and ashes. He had died after becoming so startingly weak, so staggeringly bloodless as if all the poverty, all the wretchedness of our enslaved masses was symbolised in him. We stood in reverential awe before this mighty personality which had gained from environment, and his own indomitable impulse to face death has risen higher than all the mortals present before him. I felt a sort of weakness in my chest and limbs as the cold logic of a life-and-death struggle made itself felt through me.

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CHAPTER XX

A "BIT OF MORALISM"

A PRISONER as a rule felt no need for struggling against corruption which had in addition to its evils all the qualities of a useful institution, in the jails. There was hardly any field for practising unprofitable kindness and unfruitful humanitarianism in this forsaken part of the world where fear ruled, want supervised and misery modified the conduct of the unfortunate captives. Dire necessity urged upon a prisoner to find a way out and an officer or a warder had to be totally callous in order to refuse his unfortunate appeal backed by an offer of money. It was an attitude highly objectionable or moral grounds, but the morality of the free could never be practicable for a slave. A human specimen has been denied by law all except a few of the good things of the world that can provide a sense of well-being and afford an occasional pleasure to his mind and body and he tries to cope with the circumstances. Smuggling is a part of his struggle for better conditions in the prison. He has spent some money, and thereby obtained the mitigation of

suffering and the toning down of the harshness of fate. He was, for example, being put up before the Superintendent for a jail offence and the timely expenditure of a rupee or two has saved him from imprisonment for a month or two more that would have been the result of his being punished.

The laws are strict and stern leaving little scope for escape from them. They are meant to muffle the voice of humanity, of any free expression of a will, of a desire, of a natural emotion or an instinct. They show the fist to the head and a slap to the face. The problem of all problems before a prisoner is how to avoid them. There is the ever present fear that he may be caught unawares in the clutches of a law the nature of which might never be understood. The moods of an officer may mean a lot of difference. One is at the mercy of absolute power.

The laws do not allow smuggling. A severe disciplinarian officer takes charge and tries to stop it. A Superintendent or a Deputy Superintendent bent upon stopping it succeeds to a considerable extent. He can never fully eradicate the corruption or smuggling though he undoubtedly succeeds in creating famine conditions, unprecedented scarcity of things accompanied by exorbitant increase in prices. A packet of cheap cigarettes ordinarily costing two pice may not be easily available even for two rupees ; the anti-smuggling measures have done this. The illiterate non-political prisoners feel crushed and suffocated in their limited space. They are more and more inclined to whining and complaining. It inevitably brings trouble and punishments upon them. A struggle on their part is the natural result.

The tightening of jail discipline is usually the sign that the officer newly come is creating favourable conditions for subsequent exploits in the field of mutual benefit. The prisoners with past experience understand the officer who enforces fresh restrictions.

The advent of a corrupt officer signifies better days for those who can break jail laws with the help of money. An incorruptible officer on the other hand is usually considered a monstro-

sity, a hard, cruel being, lacking in some essential quality of the heart. It might be found that either he has no offspring, or no harmonious family life or is failing in something of the sort that has sucked his heart dry . of little kindness and great joys and left him shrivelled in soul and poor in social qualities. That is how a stickler for discipline is understood in the jail.

The struggle of non-political prisoners is essentially similar to ours. The difference lies in the fact that we outside as well as inside the jail are the most vocal section of the masses. A jail officer, for that very reason does not dare to demand bribes from us. We are the people who in a way create our own problems and add to our own difficulties because of our vocal qualities. We cannot get rid of a difficulty or restriction or punishment through spending a coin or two and thus appeasing the authorities. We cannot buy facilities but must earn them by toil. They dub us propagandists and enemies of peace and rarely give credence to what we bring to their notice about conditions in the jail. The authoritative people are touchy and jealous of their power. We too have acquired a certain amount of touchiness because of the suppressive atmosphere around us and usually find ourselves inclined to make much of small quarrels with them.

There is a comparative quiet and peace in the jail, not because of any extensive jail reforms carried out by the Government, but because they have during the war inaugurated a policy of releasing long-term prisoners before the expiry of their sentences. The non-political convicts undergoing life-imprisonment are being released after they have spent from eleven to twelve years including remission. The Honourable Minister for Jails periodically visits the jail and recommends the premature release of prisoners who are put up before him by the Superintendent. This generous policy of the Government has created an atmosphere of hope in the minds of long-term prisoners. Thye can look to an early release if their jail conduct has been good. The troublesome days of the notorious, Badmashes who never found themselves outside the punitive cells or "Badmash

Line," are a thing of the past. The leniency on the part of the Government has taken the sting out of the prisoners' struggles. They suffer more patiently. The majority of the prison population consists of the agriculturist class, the peasants. They have more money nowadays in consequence of higher prices of agricultural products and can therefore spend more. Keeping their jail records clean, which means avoiding "*peshis*" (punishments) is the foremost concern in their mind. They can pay enormous sums of money to get rid of a threatened *peshi*.

This comparative peacefulness, however is not natural. My case-fellow, Pandit Rupchand, is a bit of a moralist. Why should it be, he says, that better conditions are synonymous with the rule of corrupt officers? The chronic indigestion of Pandit Rupchand makes him gather unfavourable impressions of the happiness that bribery affords to the prisoners. He takes a long-range view of things with a tinge of melancholy. He feels that the prisoners have in reality lost their fighting qualities and become considerably demoralised.

The poor who can't pay suffer more and more when such a state of affairs prevails. The system no doubt works thus. The barber of our ward fell ill and was sent to the jail hospital. He remained there under observation for three days and had daily temperature, but the doctor-in-charge refused to admit him as a regular patient or put him on diet. He complained to the Medical Officer against the doctor and the latter felt offended. Next day a fellow-prisoner beat the poor barber to please the doctor. The barber was an old prisoner, thin and weak, and fever added to the uneasiness he felt about himself in the hospital. He sent word to our ward asking our advice whether he should gratify the doctor's greed. Two of us went to the hospital and pleaded for sympathy towards the patient but the doctor was too cunning to admit any lack of care for or any displeasure against the barber. The comrades came back without having effected any improvement in the situation. The barber had to appease the doctor by paying four rupees. He

thus remained in the hospital for more than a fortnight and was given milk and curds and bread and butter, fruit being another wholesome addition to his diet. He looked much improved in health on his return to our ward. Pandit Rupchand agreed that the doctor deserved thanks. The barber told us that he could have had the rich diet for two rupees in place of four but for his moral scruples. "Damned cheap," remarked the Pandit goodnaturedly.

Abnormal conditions create abnormal personalities. There is an Assistant Superintendent, very energetic, very friendly, care-free and courageous, who has been long in service. He has never done a good service to any prisoner without adequate recompense. He was our "in charge" for several months. His inspection visit to the jail was nothing but a careful survey of the grain godown, the clothing godown, the garden, our ward and other places for things of personal requirement. He scoured the jail for the purpose. Now and then catching sight of a prisoner illegally making tea or cooking something, he would collect his due and move on. Whenever a prisoner doing the labour of a blacksmith or a tinsmith met him, he was certain to ask him to make something for him. He demanded rope from the ropemaker, gram from the gram-distributor, and so on. The sight of a prisoner automatically made him think of the service he could possibly exact. His eyes were keen, his mind alert. He would cancel a *peshi* for four or five times the sum of money any other officer would gladly accept and was still a friend of the prisoners.

The new Superintendent, a very honest officer, who was making sincere efforts for the improvement of the food and rations of the prisoners, had stopped the "*dalis*" for officers from the jail garden. The Assistant Superintendent had to go foraging for vegetables for his household, and fodder for his buffalo. He had been dismissing our interviewers without even letting us know that anyone had come to see us. We never expected him to carry his depredations into our ward, but he, true to his habit

of never putting his foot into a place without something practical in his mind, showed much interest in our garden and on his return took away an armful of vegetables. Henceforward he was careful about our interviews and other rightful privileges. In a few days he had arranged with our washerman for washing the clothes of his household. He utilised the services of our tailor, barber, and other prisoners employed in menial work. They sewed clothes brought by him, gathered grass for his buffalo, and served him in various ways. He gave false promises of remission to these workers only to make them work for him. Always laughing, always non-serious, he allowed us no opportunity to fall out with him.

He would take away the raw mangoes from our young tree. "It is only for the *chatni*," he told us when we protested. We were greatly interested to see the ripening of the fruit which our tree had borne for the first time, but the officer took away three or four mangoes daily while we were in the playground. He knew that we could not pick a quarrel with him on such a small matter. He realised that it was difficult for us to refuse him a seer or two of green vegetables. He knew many things about all prisoners and took advantage of his insight into human nature. When anyone came in a car to interview a Congress leader, he would politely ask for the use of his car for just half an hour while the interview lasted, and then have a joy-ride through the city for an hour or two as his understanding of the "situation" permitted. He saw humanity from the standpoint of its utility. Finding out new items, new ways and means and inventing new methods for filling his pockets and harnessing the people to serve his interests was his speciality, an art amongst the arts that had found in him the greatest protagonist. He was like the proverbial noble deputed by his sovereign to count the waves of the sea. The Superintendent gave him duties in places where he was supposed to "earn" nothing, but he nullified the efforts of his superior through his ingenuity and skill. At last the former had him transferred to another jail.

The Superintendent got rid of him but there were the lesser luminaries, a bit rougher in dealing with the prisoners but ploughmen all the same, active for the harvest.

It was under the circumstances really impossible for a prisoner to give up what was to him simply buying of articles of use as well as services. Two seers of milk and other valuable items of diet could be had for a month for four or five rupees.

Money could provide relief from drudgery, from irksome labour and many other causes of irritation and dissatisfaction. The officers and warders thus helped the prisoners to become habitual law-breakers and confirmed believers in underhand methods. Individualism of the most selfish sort was encouraged in detriment to the social habits of struggling together. Everyone tried to fend for himself through thick and thin, looking only to the marketable generosity of the jail officials. The scheme for educating the illiterate prisoners was vitiated by bribery because the remission promised to those whose progress in education might be reported, could be had from an obliging officer without making any actual effort at reading and writing. The slow poison of callousness and indifference towards one another was increasingly affecting the mental and moral health of the prisoners. Much could be attributed to the war-conditions. The prisoners who bribed the officers were no less responsible for corruption because they left no stone unturned in obtaining illegal satisfaction of their needs.

We, the politicals, were fortunate in depending upon unity and concord amongst ourselves. Joint pressure was the sole means at our disposal to obtain concessions. To fight on moral grounds was rightly expected of us. Even the jail officers were in a position to criticise us if we raised selfish issues. We acquiesced in the jail officials' right of censuring our conduct for the sake of the corresponding right of raising questions relating to general mismanagement in the jail. It depended upon what sort of officer had to deal with us. We were at times

allowed to plead for improvements of a general nature in respect of all the prisoners. We had become "old prisoners" and some though not all officers treated us so far as they could like gentlemen. It was all due to the personal goodness of the new Superintendent.

CHAPTER XXI

A LIKELY ISSUE OR A CRUEL JOKE

THE question of our release had again attracted our attention. It had its past history and had the effect of projecting our thoughts into the future. It was nothing more than a prisoner's view, that we too should be released like the ordinary criminals who were getting out not a day after serving ten or eleven years of imprisonment. The Congress leaders present here were interested in the question. We kept our pessimism to ourselves and let them use their influence with the Punjab Ministry.

The Government had never clearly defined what was meant by the term transportation for life though their policy as enunciated in the statement of the Punjab Premier, in the Legislative Assembly in 1938, was to release life-term prisoners after the expiry of fourteen years' rigorous imprisonment, including remission. They stuck to this policy in case of non-political prisoners, but had no doubt laid down a different standard for us. Pandit Kishori Lal had completed his fourteen years in 1941 but was not yet released. Mr. K.L. Gauba, a distinguished lawyer of Lahore, filed a Habeas Corpus petition on his behalf in the High Court. Mr. Gauba had been an "A" class prisoner in jail and we had met him and discussed the legal points for the petition. He took no fees and within a few days

of his release filed the petition. The law point which he put before the court was that Pandit Kishori Lal had been sentenced to transportation for life, which sentence was neither carried out nor commuted, and that the prisoner had been undergoing rigorous imprisonment which could not exceed fourteen years. Mr. Justice Monroe did not accept the ground for the petition and no hearing took place. A revision petition filed later on was rejected. Mr Pritt, a London lawyer, filed an appeal in the Privy Council against the decision of the Lahore High Court.

We knew little about law and even less about legal procedure but we had made up our minds to take the decision for or against the law point raised by us. The jail authorities had testified to the effect that Pandit Kishori Lal was undergoing rigorous imprisonment, which in the words of the Criminal Procedure Code "should in no way exceed fourteen years." The Pandit should have been transported (transportation for life meant being sent to the Andamans) and failing that his sentence according to the *Jail Manual* ought to have been commuted to that of rigorous imprisonment. The Government had done neither. A favourable decision would have meant a lot of difference to the lifers whose fate depended on the mercy and whim of the bureaucracy. An adverse decision could anyhow do no more than give the Government the already existing right to keep us in jail for any length of time they desired. The case was now before the Privy Council.

After Pandit Kishori Lal's came my turn. I had completed my fourteen years by the end of 1943. Another Habeas Corpus petition was filed, the decision on which was postponed pending the outcome of the first case before the Privy Council. A year and a half went by. In the beginning of 1944 we at last learned that the Privy Council had upheld the Government contention that they were not bound to release Pandit Kishori Lal until he had finished the tentative limit of twenty-five years' imprisonment with or without remission. The Council, however, made it clear that they could not restrict the Government to regard the twenty-five years' limit as definite.

Pandit Rupchand, Malik Kundan Lal and Swami Hans Raj too completed their terms but the doors of the law had been shut once and for all against us. Our rolls were sent to the Government and they ordered them to be resubmitted after each one of us had completed eighteen years. The Privy Council decision had given them unlimited powers and made their absolutism more absolute than the most pessimistic expectations of any of us. We would have preferred to remain indefinitely in jail to this strengthening of the hands of the bureaucracy. A little faith in the law had resulted in being cheated out of all chances of obtaining legal help. We were afraid of the repercussions of the Privy Council decision upon the non-political lifers in the jail, who had to blame none but us if the Government changed their policy of releasing them after fourteen years, but to our great relief the old policy of leniency continued in their case.

Mr. Justice Monroe had on the occasion of the informal hearing of Pandit Kishori Lal's petition remarked that the case was that of a dangerous terrorist criminal, and our subsequent experience of law courts had convinced us that the law would sense danger and terrorism whenever we made an approach to it. We knew that the war was on and it was the only hindrance to our release. We also had the information that the Punjab Ministry had been considering our cases for release before the commencement of the war. But the idea that the war was going to end in a year or so was prevalent all over the world and the possibility of our being set free after a year or more had begun to affect our minds. We saw absolutely no use in raising the release question before peace came to the world, but it had raised itself from its former vague and unconscious existence into a real issue awaiting solution within less than two years at the most. The everreceding and slippery liberty had come within the ambit of plausible guesses and reasonable calculations.

The invasion of the Continent had brought the end of the war nearer. Germany was on her last legs. Some provincial Congress leaders were released on medical grounds. One of

them met a high-ranking official in connection with our release and was told that the Government would let us out on our completing twenty years. He asked whether the end of the war would mean any change in this attitude of the Government towards the terrorist prisoners and was informed that that might be the case but he could at present give no assurance of any change. Asked why the rolls of certain prisoners had been ordered to be resubmitted after completion of eighteen years and not twenty he replied that it was only a matter of official routine signifying no definite limit. It was really salutary, this knowledge of the official mind. We were, however, not impressed by their intentions to keep us for twenty years. We had more faith in our estimate of two years more of prison life than in that of six years proposed by the high-ranking authority. We talked about the future when we sat together, at table, in the radio room or walked in our garden. We formulated our plans without being overserious about them. Malik Kundan Lal, the big schemer, was to earn forty crores of rupees, equal to the census of the Indian population and Pandit Kishori Lal was to become his managing agent. The former only feared a dangerous kick from the latter when the scheme was complete. Other fears were of smaller nature, of playing the dual role of instigating strikers in the newly established industrial concerns, of breaking the spokes of the running wheel of prosperity, etc., etc. I had had many occasions for speaking on business with L. Prithvi Chand Nayyar of the A.I.S.A. who had four hundred thousand acres of land (desert) in the south-west of our province and he agreed to send me the information I required on his release if I persisted in my vast agricultural project. Pandit Rupchand had the standing offer of Jathedar Chanan Singh to become his Private Secretary or munshi, as he was supposed to be an expert in writing letters and preparing despatches. Swami Hans Raj had to think of organising a press.

One untoward happening at this time affected us deeply. A C.I.D. man who had been living amongst us (one is never sure whether one is a police spy or not) was released and he made

many reports to his department, both false and true. He reported amongst other things, that the convicted terrorist prisoners and the security prisoners detained without trial were kept in the same place and that the former were availing themselves of all facilities allowed by rules to the latter. The result was that the Government ordered the Jail Superintendent to confine the two categories of prisoners in separate places. We five remained in the Terrorist Ward while the others were ordered to shift to the two other political wards, though accommodation was already scarce there. The order meant a great inconvenience for all but it had to be carried out.

We were again deprived of good society. It had been a "war measure" sort of privilege that we had been enjoying and we knew that the Government had never meant to give us the right of association with the prisoners of any category except those of our own. The lonely furrow of our life-path spanned the short length of our world, and the illusion of release no more diverted our attention.

The intervening wall of indifference had nevertheless broken. We could foresee our freedom in the not very distant future. The world let our dreams pass through its dust-coloured veil. Their paths lay through winds, storms, the gaseous nebulae of tall buildings, tumults, laughter and sunshine and multitudinous gatherings of men, old friends, forgotten relatives ; past visions of roads and places were revived during sleep and entered into consciousness from some backdoor of the memory. The dreams referred more and more to the world at large while the conscious mind was yet under the pressure of hard reality of the present. My natural pessimism was mindful of the pitfalls of exuberant hopes. The emancipation of the soul in bondage was yet to be effected. The breath, the nerve, the eye and the heart had to be awakened from their long communion with the close, narrow atmosphere of the prison. The past, standing sentinel on the threshold of the present, questioned the birthright of fresh hopes and new plans to contact the future.

What is the past but a series of feelings and emotions, cries and counter cries of life in travail ? The jail life had condi-

tioned our future. I saw our release as part of a never ending struggle. The change for the better had to be forced by the nation. There were prospects of a struggle continuing several years after the end of the war and our fate was dependent upon the after-war position of the nationalist forces of our country. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Mahatma Gandhi had been released, but not because of a changed attitude of the Government towards the Indian National Congress. We could only believe in the efforts of the nationalist leaders, in the public pressure and in the voice of the country. Never could we have faith in the good-will of the present ministry which was helpless before the impassive dignity of the permanent officials and possessed no real powers.

Dr. Gopi Chand, L. Raghunandan Saran, S. Atma Singh of Sheikhupura and some other prominent Congress leaders were released on medical grounds or otherwise. The Akali leaders, Jathedars Sohan Singh, Jalal Usman and Chanan Singh and others were also released one by one. Chaudhari Kartar Singh, M.L.A., had come for dental treatment from Rawalpindi. The recent arrest of Mr. Bikram Lal Sondhi and some other Congressmen showed that the Government were yet mindful of the need of both-way prison-traffic. L. Deshbandhu Gupta, Mr. Virendra, Maulana Daud Ghaznavi and several newly arrived friends were interested in the question of our release. Friends outside were also continuing their efforts but the Government saw no reason for deflecting from their considered policy.

The *Tribune* of Lahore had published a note about Mr. Virendra's reported serious condition of health, and the Minister for Jails himself came to the jail to see him. Mr. Virendra told the Minister that the report in the paper was exaggerated though he had an undiagnosed trouble in the region of the appendix weakening his health, but it was nothing serious in his view. He did not wish to be released because of this. Mr. Virendra on the other hand pressed for the release of the terrorist prisoners. He pleaded with the Minister that we five should be

shown the same leniency as was shown to ordinary life-convicts. The Superintendent, Rai Sahib B.C. Katoch, was present at this interview and he also strongly recommended our release on grounds of our excellent conduct in the jail. The Minister was patiently listening to the facts of our case as presented to him by Mr. Virendra but he showed no willingness to consider our case sympathetically. The forceful and persistent pleading of Mr. Virendra at last made him agree to see us himself on the occasion of his next visit. He said he would ascertain our views and see what could be done.

Mr. Virendra remained for a few days more in the prison and was then transferred to Mayo Hospital for the diagnosis of his trouble. He could have easily obtained his release had he only verbally confirmed the statement in the Press about his health, but he was a straightforward, undemonstrative young man of set principles and youthful spirit. He had some days before received a notice to show cause why he should not be detained for a further period of six months, and had replied that he as a member of the Congress believed in the policy and programme of the organisation and was proud of what he had done for the country's sake under the banner of the Congress.

There were along with him five or six other political prisoners undergoing treatment in the "sick" wards of the Mayo Hospital. Comrade Muhammad Yamin Dar had been there waiting for an operation for hernia. The warder of the jail who used to take food to the prisoner-patients brought daily news about their health. Mr. Virendra one day came, with the permission of the jail authorities, to see us. He said it would be better for us to prepare also a written application giving the reasons for our release and hand it to the Minister on the day of his visit.

On the 21st of March the Honourable Minister for Jails paid a visit to the jail and we were called to the office to appear before him. Swami Hans Raj's health reports indicating high blood pressure had been brought to his notice by the jail authorities. The medical officer of the jail was called in to give his opinion about Swamiji's present state of health. The Home Secretary had also accompanied the Minister to the prison.

The Minister asked Swami Hans Raj various questions, about his health, his views about terrorism, etc., and seemed to be satisfied with his answers. He then asked whether any others of us were suffering from any serious trouble and we told him that it was not the case. The Superintendent, Rai Sahib B.C. Katoch, handed over our application to the Home Secretary and declared that he strongly recommended our case for release. He told the Minister that our conduct in the jail had been satisfactory, that he considered us well-behaved gentlemen and could confidently say that we would prove useful citizens if released.

The medical officer had explained the nature of the reports about Swamiji's blood pressure which was a serious thing for a man of his young age.

The Minister and the Home Secretary went away, and on the 23rd of March orders were issued to the jail authorities for the release of Swami Hans Raj on condition of his depositing a security of Rs. 2,000. Instructions were issued by the Home Secretary to transfer Swamiji to Sialkot, the jail of his home district, in order to facilitate the deposit of security. It was a matter of deepest satisfaction to us to see our suffering comrade obtain his freedom. We went to the jail gate, to bid him farewell. The release of a lifer is always like a rebirth and we felicitated him on his entry again into the world after full twelve years of prison life.

He was, however, not released and came back from Sialkot after a week. It was a great shock to see him back. It transpired that his release orders had been cancelled the day after his reaching Sialkot Jail. We could not see any reason for this cruel joke upon a sick person like him. We had with our own eyes seen the release orders wherein his remaining sentence was remitted by the Governor and now he was here again as if the illusion of freedom was created to give poignancy to the bitter days of his remaining life in jail. We felt that it was the arrogant answer to our demand for release, and, took it calmly like a rejected appeal for justice.

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CHAPTER XXII

COMRADE YAMIN'S DEATH

THE day of the operation drew near and comrade Yamin came to see us. No physical weakness could take away the vivacity of his spirit, and he remained all day long with us, telling stories about the hospital, doctor and nurses and our other comrades present there. Last time he had been sent back to the Gujarat Jail while the extraction of his teeth and other dental treatment was still going on. He had come back this time for completion of the dental treatment and for an operation for hernia. The extraction of a single tooth gave him trouble for many days because the bleeding of his gums would not stop. The doctors were giving him calcium injections for anæmia. None of his major visceral organs was even in a tolerably healthy condition. But he could never outwardly look serious or sick. He had again and again come from Gujarat in connection with the treatment of his ailments and this was the fourth time. Love and regard for us had been all the while in the process of incubation and the proof of his swelling sympathy and increasing attachment was found in his most intelligent and considerate attitude towards the understanding of our hunger for society. He introduced new political workers and laboured persistently to unite them to us on the basis of fast friendship. Mr. Yudhvir of *Milap*, Lahore, was introduced by him to us. Pandit Lekh Ram, the editor of *Hindi Milap*, and many friends previously unknown, met us like intimate friends and we knew that it was comrade Muhammad Yamin's friendship working for us. His readiness to give and take and his other good traits almost amounting to defects, made us fear an emotional outburst sometimes, but we had by and by come to know the exactly opposite quality of his unemotional reading into human character.

He understood quite well that medical treatment was not the undisputed right of a political prisoner. He, moreover, knew that outside the jail it was difficult for an active political worker

to spend two or three months in a hospital for the sake of his health. Several such considerations weighed with him and he decided to undergo the operation he had come for.

"I am a timid Kashmiri, inclined to make a tremendous noise, under the knife of a surgeon," he jokingly told us that day.

"I may die," said he in the same jocular vein pointing out the proverbial easiness with which a Kashmiri could be dead.

We told him of the well-known persistence of the Kashmiris.

"I cannot waste my time on operations and treatment outside," he reasoned aloud.

What an unemotional and exacting attitude he had regarding his health and his life! The time that he spent that day with us was of a jolly nature. We had been touching upon the minor keys of his jocular nature and boisterous mirth remained his occupation of the day. In the evening he asked for some gramophone records and a few other things that he wanted to take with him to the hospital and prepared to go.

The operation did not succeed as the wound became septic. The warder on duty brought news of his growingly serious condition every day, but there was no danger to his life he assured us. Penicillin injections were given him but they did not prove effective. He died at 4-30 A.M. on the 12th of April, 1945.

We went to the jail office and saw that the letter he had written five days before to his wife and children asking them to come and see him in the hospital, was still lying uncensored and unposted at the table where the C.I.D. officer used to work. They could not even see him before his death.

A few days latter came Mr. Patnaik of Orissa, a detenu and a former Captain of the Air Transport Service, who was a patient in the hospital in those days and told us many touching stories of the last days of comrade Yamin.

"I wish I could weep," he had said half-seriously one day to his comrade in the hospital before the operation.

"Who forbids you to do so? Begin right now so that I may see what you look like doing that!" retorted the humorous airman, Mr. Patnaik.

"What is the use of weeping before an impertinently unsympathetic fellow like you?" asked comrade Yamin.

"A doctor or a nurse would be better company. I should call one," suggested Mr. Patnaik.

Raising his head a little from the pillow Yamin smiled a helpless smile and replied, "I could weep, but for the presence of these policemen of the guard. What would they say if I wept before them?" He went on in an emotional strain. "I have not wept even during the intense pain that I have occasionally felt. I have enough reason for weeping and have felt the urge to do so many a time these days. I have wept to my heart's content on several occasions in the past without any rhyme or reason and had always felt a relief. I feel I shall do it after going back to the jail from the hospital!"

His strong emotions had linked him with his friends, with the country and with the cause of her freedom. His heart and mind were sound and active even when the whole of his body below the chest became the hotbed of septic poison. The swelling increased with the poison and he felt no pain because of an overwhelming love that had surged up in his heart for the present or absent friends dear to him. The doctors were making frantic efforts to save his life, but he was calmly contemplating the faces of the comrades standing near his bed. Suddenly he began to gasp, and passed away in a few moments. His death was a cruel shock to all of us.

CHAPTER XXIII

NET RESULT

GERMANY surrendered on 8th May. Her fate had sealed the fate of her eastern partner Japan too. The end of the Pacific War was not far off. The Government relaxed their repressive policy to the extent of releasing some ailing prisoners. Mr. Virendra, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, Mr. Patnaik, Mr. B. L. Sondhi and a few others were set free, but restrictions were imposed on their movement and speech.

The Viceroy proposed to call a conference of the leaders of different parties of India in order to find out ways and means of ending the constitutional deadlock. He also announced that the members of the Congress Working Committee were being released to allow them to take part in the forthcoming conference.

The Congress President Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and other members of the Working Committee came out of prison after about three years of continued incarceration. There was a large gathering at Simla of leaders of various parties in addition to the invitees to the conference. Mr. Virendra went there after obtaining special permission. Scores of friends who had known us in jail were there. The ban on the Congress High Command had been lifted and it had taken up the question of the release of all political prisoners including the pre-reform prisoners like us. Mahatma Gandhi declared that the release question was of foremost importance at the moment and was being brought to the notice of the Government with all the urgency it demanded.

The Congress President Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, undertook to contact the Viceroy on the issue. Our friends Dr. Gopi Chand, L. Deshbandhu Gupta, Mr. Virendra, Seth Sudarshan, Raizada Hans Raj, L. Bhim Sen Sachar, S. Atma Singh of Sheikhupura, Master Ajit Singh Ambalvi, Jathedar Sohan Singh,

Jalal Usman and many others utilised the opportunity of the presence of all the high officials and ministers at Simla, and pressed the question of our release. L. Deshbandhu Gupta and Mr. Virendra again saw the Minister for Jails, Dr. Gopi Chand and several other Congressmen met Maulana Azad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in this connection. The Akali friends approached Sardar Baldev Singh, the Development Minister, and impressed upon him the necessity of adopting a generous policy towards the release of terrorists.

Never had our question been put before the Government with such concerted pressure. Mr. Virendra had been trying since the day he arrived at Simla, to interest important personages in the issue of our release. We could never have raised it with such persistence as he did even in the presence of the immensely important problem before the country of solving the constitutional deadlock. We as well as our well-wishers knew that we would be free if the conference succeeded. The country was demanding the changes that were for the interest of the whole population of the vast prison that was India. Our sympathisers and well-wishers had done much to bring our particular case to the notice of the Congress President, and deserved our gratitude.

The conference failed. The proposals that the Congress and Muslim League leaders, Mr. Bhulabhai Desai and Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan had submitted to the Viceroy before his departure to London, had been vitiated by the changes that had been effected in them by the British Government ; and the distorted version of those proposals brought back by the Viceroy for the Indian leaders to deliberate upon, could bear no fruitful results.

What had been done and said for us even in view of the probable failure of the conference was gratifying to us in the extreme. So much good-will and kindly feeling had been lavished upon us that we felt we owed a debt to the people that could never be paid It was no exaggeration to say that the question was overstressed. We wanted to forget the topic of our release.

but it cropped up again and again when some friend wrote a hopeful letter or sent a cheerful message. One day the news came that the prospects of release were gloomy, another day we would hear of a fairly good chance of liberation in the very near future. Weeks, months, days, figured in guesses and calculations of friends outside. Our own estimate of two years that we had made was no guarantee that we were not liable to change under strong influences. It was like being pulled and squeezed within the bounds that held us which were being loosened with effort. Strangely enough we had no part in that effort. To wait patiently till conditions in the country changed would have been the ideal course for us, but the comrades who were out of jail could not sit idle till their companions still inside were also free, and thus the issue was being kept constantly alive.

Japan laid down her arms on the 14th of August. The detenus and the security prisoners who had been detained for the period of the war could not be kept with any show of reason any longer. The Government began to release them in small batches.

The ban on various Congress committees was being lifted. The top-rank Congress leaders spoke their mind about various problems before the country. The Communists and the Muslim League had taken full advantage of Congressmen's absence from the political field and disseminated views of their own, but now the Congress view was being put forth with all the force that it required. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Pandit Pant and others criticised the anti-Congress and pro-League attitude of the Communist Party. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had made clear the Congress stand regarding the Pakistan demand. The Congress stood for a united India, but it would never cœrce the Muslims or any other minority who did not want to remain in it, declared the Congress President.

The Viceroy had gone to London and brought fresh proposals. According to these proposals general elections were to be held all over India, and a constitution-making body set up to prepar an agreed premanent constitution for India.

The restrictions on the Press and on public workers were to be removed in order to leave them free for the electioneering campaign. Several M.L.A.'s including our old friends S. Partap Singh and Ch. Kartar Singh were released one by one. A large number of Congress detenus and security prisoners were set free in batches. There was no general amnesty, no wholesale releases which the Congress President had demanded, and scores of prisoners were yet left behind bars for "security reasons."

The President visited Lahore in connection with the Congress work in the Punjab and came to see us in the jail on the morning of 8th October. He was accompanied by the Minister for Jails, Sir Manohar Lal, and several Congress leaders including our old friends Maulana Daud Ghaznavi, now the President of the Provincial Congress, and Ch. Kartar Singh and Seth Sudarshan. The interview took place in the office of the Superintendent.

Maulana Azad looked much pulled down and the state of his health was alarming. He had not been feeling well for sometime and the strain of overwork since his release had given him no chance to recoup his health. We saw his imposing figure sink into the chair and took our seats close to him.

He told us that he was pressing for the release of all politieal prisoners including terrorists. He could find no peace in his heart, he said, until we all were free. He informed us that he had been in correspondence with the Viceroy, who had written to him that the cases of those who had undergone more than fourteen years of imprisonment would be considered.

We thanked him for his efforts. He hoped that we would be set free in the near future.

The President then went inside the jail to see the security prisoners confined in two different wards.

There could be no greater advocate of the political prisoners' cause than the Congress President. We reposed our faith in him then fully implying our faith in the country, in her future, and we were content.

Time passed on ; we are now interested more in men than in books. What can a prisoner gain from long imprisonment except toleration and the capacity to see both sides of a picture if the necessary mental prerequisite is lacking? But what after all was the value of that toleration and understanding to me when all the past fifteen years of my life had been spent in fighting for small things and insignificant considerations? The noble instinct of man, which finds satisfaction in working for a noble cause or a great ideal, and can release tremendous energy for social work is liable to suffer from lack of employment. Our life has seen no rise and fall, no emotional unheavals, no vicissitudes of fortune. The instincts for love, for friendship, the strong desire for protecting the weak and combating the strong have all combined to find vent in a nervous restlessness easily convertible into bellicosity. We had been from time to time subjected to unhealthy influences and unnecessary struggles and that was how we had acquired and got rid of health fads, exercise fads, food and diet fads ; insult, inferiority (or superiority) and persecution complexes and thus carried on an unremitting internal struggles parallel to that against external conditions.

The struggle complex is still in us as the abiding condition of life. Fifteen long years have passed. I have come to the cross-road, where love leads, understanding clears and sympathy brightens the path. But these qualities are in me in the form of cherished objectives and not creditable achievements. They can never be achieved. Many illusions have met their end in the past, and the retention of the remaining few is an absolute necessity. Our conduct might have been quite different, but for the fixed idea of maintaining the self-respect and dignity of political prisoners during our captivity. Many a possible mutual strife had been prevented by this hard-imposed self-control. It was partly due to the fear in the background, of affording opportunity to the jail officers to exploit our differences.

Our relations with the jail officers nowadays are exceptionally harmonious. The Superintendent is a perfect genteman and as

sympathetic towards us as his official duties can possibly permit. The jail officers also feel that we are going to be released soon. The Superintendent is a patient, cool-headed person with new ideas and new schemes for the improvement of the lot of the prisoners. He is interested in removing corruption and likes to invite suggestions of a helpful nature. The difficulty is that the staff does not fully co-operate with him. His progressive ideas are an anachronism, little suiting the mind of the hardened "menherds," the officers who have inherited the art of treating prisoners like cattle. He is working under great handicaps. Whenever we go to the office, we usually find a queue of officers lined up outside his office. The Superintendent peruses every paper carefully before signing it. The waiting officers have been used to thoughtless decisions, careless signatures, and cursory inspections. "The difficulty is that he does not know how to work," remarked an officer to me. "The difficulty is that he has a legal mind and wants to do justice to all," I observed smilingly.

"Does he know what laws should mean to us? The laws are made for smoothness, for facilitating and expediting work and not for creating impediments in the day-to-day routine," he retorted.

"The fact that he has checked corruption to a degree and improved the food of the prisoners speaks for itself," I persisted.

"May God help him but can he ever succeed by losing the sympathy of his staff ?" asked the officer in an overwrought pious mood.

He had touched the real problem, *viz.*, that of co-operation. He had, however, no notion of obtaining the prisoners' co-operation too without which no progress was possible Nothing except giving them the legal and social status of partnership in the common struggle for the betterment of the society inside jail, could procure faithful results. The good work of one officer was easily undone by another. A facility obtained by some well-

meaning prisoners was misused by others and the muddle of the prison administration continued. No fundamental change in the relationship between the officers and the prisoners had come about within the past fifteen years and our experience had made us indifferent towards temporary efforts of the latter and make-believe progressive trend in the former.

"The Government has no idea of fixing a limit to the days of our imprisonment, and if we knew how to suffer silently like Mahatma Parmanand of Jhansi, they would never mind our breaking the record of twenty-three years excluding remission set up by him," remarked Pandit Rupchand one day but added hopefully, "We can't be in for long because they would be unable to resist the demand of the country."

This optimistic note struck by him was something recent in his talks, because he had been always more pessimistic than any of us. He would either astonish us by making a very realistic observation, or raise a contradictory voice by exaggerating the dark side of a picture. "What if we get released today ?" he suddenly asked enthusiastically.

"I would think as though I had been imprisoned only yesterday and begin my life from the beginning," was my swift answer to the most ticklish question that he had ever put.

And I talked as I thought. "The past is past. What would have been the net result had we not taken to political work and limited ourselves to an unpretentious and uneventful family life ? We would have earned a lot or might have been living from hand to mouth but it would have been the end of our ambitions in every way. The success or failure of a life is immaterial to the man whose outlook gradually narrows down to the welfare of a few ailing children and unimaginative relatives. We have the wherewithal to re-enter the world with enthusiasm and hope. We have lost nothing if we have not lost our ambitions."

"The mutually destructive policies of different political parties and the resultant rivalry and hatred are a serious handicap in the path of progress. What do you say about it ?" he asked.

"You should believe in what is right and work according to the dictates of your conscience."

"The difficulty about me is, you know, that I make a great distinction between good and bad, fair and unfair, noble and base, and always judge men by an impractical standard. The signs of a good man to me are the conditions and circumstances of life permitting his evolution from good to better, from better to best, for himself as well as for society. In politics he who climbs down from national to communal, from communal to sectional and from sectional to personal has something basically wrong, a converse notion of progress. The greatness of man lies in his ability to discard narrowness of outlook all along the path of his life. But you know that Mr. X of the * * * Party would prefer one of its most unscrupulous and unprincipled members, Mr. Y, to Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest man of the modern age. Don't you daily hear of people in these days of general elections, changing fronts and donning new labels, and blowing the ideals of truth and faith to the winds ?"

The Pandit was nowadays seriously thinking of how he would continue the work in the cause of the national struggle. Sometimes the plan of starting a nationalist newspaper appealed to him. He usually thought of working on a non-party basis.

My views did not differ very much from his but my proposed line of action was different. I laid more stress upon political rather than social handicaps in our path. I felt that in this age of matter and machine and inevitable uplift of the mental plane, truth and religion are not sufficient as guiding principles for humanity. See and judge, decide and act and go on and on ! The spirit of quest, the goading of necessity and the

disillusioning spur of reality have always disregarded and must disregard those pious sentiments of old. Progress is the word. Harness to its van the frailties and errors, impieties and truths, shades and lights, in short all you possess, and make a pull forward ! A little better than ever, a little higher than before, a bit more of efficiency and executive capacity than the world-humanity has hitherto possessed, is the supreme criterion. March forward with energy and spirit. That is all we lose as well as gain in every effort ; why bother about the fading lights on the complexion of humanity !

We are preparing for a new life, but it is yet to come !

CHAPTER XXIV

BEFORE THE GALLOWS

ABOUT fifteen and a half years have passed in jail. I do not feel inclined to look back. The country has gone forward in its march towards freedom and so has our little world in its limited way. The black bread that broke in the hands of the prisoners on being touched has given place to a better whole-wheat *chapatti*. Lynching of the prisoners has become a rare phenomenon. The officers, especially the new well-educated recruits into the service, are seldom seen to misuse their powers. This is all for the better, but the life of the prisoner is still uneasy. The reason is that there has been no fundamental change in the laws though much improvement has been effected in the matter of their application. Men in the service are better because of a general progressive trend in the country.

We stand at the threshold of freedom.

"Let us see the gallows," I requested the Superintendent one day. A man was to be hanged and my comrades and I wanted to see the execution.

We entered the condemned prisoners' ward, the terrible old place where I had spent six months in a cell. The dying man's cell was opened and the tying and handcuffing process completed within a few minutes. He was a well-built Sikh in the prime of his youth, who had turned Muhammadan under fear of execution. He had changed his name hoping thereby to avert his fate. "I am not * * * Singh ; I am * * * Khan," he remonstrated before the Superintendent.

"There is nothing in the change of name," replied the latter.

A minute or two passed and he was led to the gallows. He mounted the steps of the hanging structure and stood on the plank. The hangman put the noose around his neck and he said "Do not press so hard !"

His words were cut short by the falling of the plank beneath him. He was hanging from the rope within three minutes of

his starting from the condemned cells. What a lightning stroke his life had met ! The executioner was so swift, so machine-like, so skilled !

The executed man had killed his wife because she was unfaithful to him. His own death was a more elaborate process spread over months of agonising wait, and culminated today in the most brutal manner ever devised by man !

His body, completely lifeless, swayed to and fro at the end of the rope. He was like the pendulum of the clock of death, giving in its rhythmical tone a warning to the blind and unimaginative living who knew not the worth of human life.

His execution was a surprising feat of human ingenuity. I had expected the process to last longer. I had come to see but in fact saw nothing, at least of the pre-execution process. I climbed up to the gallows and saw him from above. He was dead. The rope's swing lent movement to his remains! His Hands and feet were turned blue ; his neck could be fully caught between two fingers.

Now the doctor came and testified to his death. They took him down, and carried him to the iron beadstead placed a few steps in front of the halter. His black dress and black cap, his handcuffs and shoulder-straps, were removed anb his body placed in the coffin supplied by the jail. They raised his head and closed his eyes and lips. He seemed to be yet living, able to see and speak ! The flexibility of his body was the same as of a living man !

The neck, what had become of it? It seemed to be squeezed out of existence. He was otherwise the same as before starting from his cell.

He appeared in my dreams. His death was like a warning, told in the language of images, whispers, hard knecks for the thinking apparatus! A week passed before I could become my former self.

I pray to society at large to reconsider its plan of justice and revise its methods of carrying it out !

Postscript : We the five lifers and Baba Gurmukh Singh who had been sent to our ward a few days back were released unconditionally on th 13th of February, 1946.



B.K. Datt with Shahid-Bhagat Singh;s Mother



Bhagat Singh.



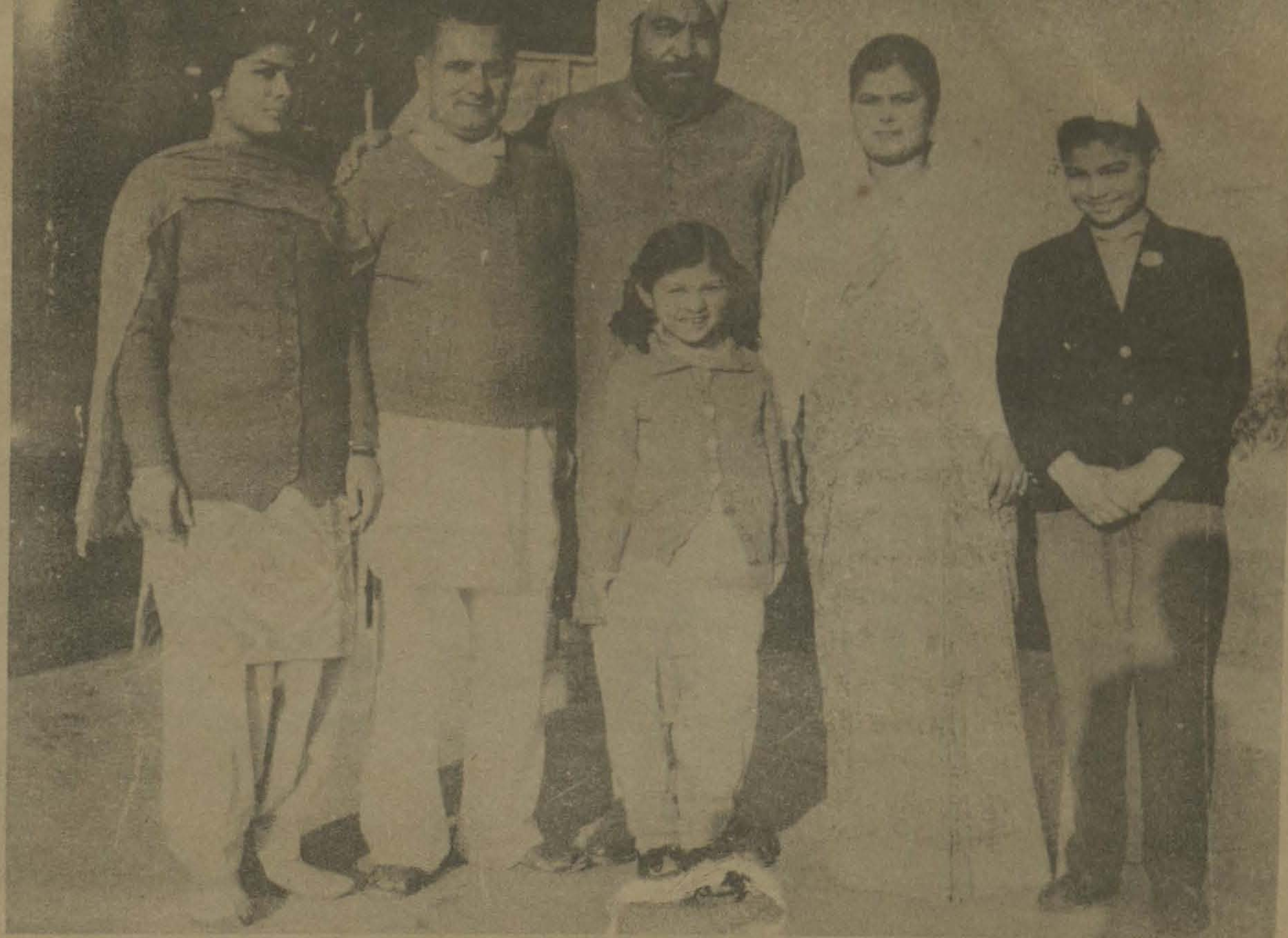
Old Comrades Met on 32 Anniversary of Bhagat Singh.



Inder Pal Brave son of Mother Land.



Bhim Sain   Inder Pal   Sewa Ram



Author with family and Pt. Roop Chand.